

THE HAPPY WARRIORS

HALLDOR LAXNESS

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REVIEWS

"As pastiche *The Happy Warriors* is worthy of its famous forerunners. Here the dialogues are pared to essentials, used only to convey information, the abrupt appearance of new characters introduced by a potted biography, the matter-of-fact recital of death and disaster which are the hall-marks of the saga. Here also is the attitude of the saga-teller, who recites exactly what happened and leaves his audience to supply praise and blame; for truth must not be altered in the cause of art.".....

"The general effect of the satire, as of all good satires, is exhilarating. The author does not despise Vikings but cowardly Vikings; he does not dislike Christians but unworthy Christians. This is a true comedy, well translated into the archaic English appropriate to its theme."

The Times Literary Supplement (London).



"Stubbornly persistent social anachronisms and the impact on traditional *mores* of a new and alien culture provide—for the satirist no less than the anthropological research-worker—first-rate raw material.....

Any heroic glamour still hanging round the Vikings is ruthlessly stripped away in *The Happy Warriors*. Halldor Laxness has chosen his period cleverly.".....

"..... at times this book reads like a lurid "Don Quixote" on ice. Seldom can the Viking myth have taken such a sustained and justified drubbing.

Mr. Laxness (aided and abetted by Katherine John's high spirited pastiche translation) parodies the saga style with fluent relish. Nevertheless his tale is solidly founded on history. There is a weird Viking's eye view of the proselytising Roman Church and English Readers will be amused by certain physiological weaknesses of Ethelred the Unready which never got into the history book."

Daily Telegraph (London).



"THE HAPPY WARRIORS is set in the ancient Norse lands of the Vikings. The heroes are the oath brothers Thormod and Thorgeir, the story is their saga. Together they roam through Iceland, Greenland and Norway, Thorgier the fiercer character reaching as far as France and England. Thormod is led "astray" for a while by his lovely wife and two children, but on hearing of his oath brother's death he forsakes all this and abandons them to avenge him. The code of ferocity and plundering admired by the Vikings is parodied by the author though his satire is most unobtrusive."

Statesman (Calcutta).



"Mr. Laxness's novel is amusing and to me very enthralling,".....

"The story is told, and expertly told in the language of the Scandinavian Chroniclers of a few centuries later, say Snorri Strulason.....As a story THE HAPPY WARRIORS seems to me first rate.....and Miss John's translation preserves the saga quality most faithfully."

Angus Wilson, in *Observer* (London).



★ 1 ★

Renowned above all men of the Westfjords in Iceland are the two champions and oath-brothers, Thorgeir Havarsson and Thormod Bessason; no wonder there should be many tales of them not only in Isafjord Deep where they grew up, but in the Jökulfjords and at Hornstrands, for in all these places they did notable deeds. It is not long since the west country had peasant chroniclers, and old wives with good memories, who could relate adventures of theirs not to be found in any book, though many a noble and profitable book has been made on these two Westfjord men. Most that is told of these champions seems to us so extraordinary that it is surely well worth sitting up late to give it new life. To that end we have here gathered together accounts of their manly prowess culled from many books. Foremost it behoves us to name the great *Oath-Brothers' Saga*, and thereafter many instructive stories to be found in Icelandic parchments laid up for centuries in the repositories of foreign lands; and lastly, there are many old foreign books yielding a diversity of well-grounded and exact knowledge, especially when our tale has advanced a certain way. Much we have heard from reliable folk who lived at Hornstrands before that district was laid waste, and out west in the Jökulfjord country, which even as we set down these words is becoming a desert, since the weaklings born in our time have no stomach for the fearful sublimity of those parts. And from many hidden springs we have drawn forth matter on these oath-brothers, no less credible in our judgment than what all know through the books we already have. But every man or woman that is a better chronicler than we or has a

better memory, shall be welcome to bring what is set down in these pages nearer the truth.

Annalists have always been wont to start with the chiefs that were in authority where the action takes place, and we shall here follow their example that the order of events described in this book may be clearer.

In those days the Westfjords on the Breidafjord side were under the rule of Thorgils Arason of the manor of Reyk-jaholar.

Thorgils' youth had been spent in trading voyages, where he had exchanged poverty for wealth. He thought peace more gainful than war; with silver he had bought himself an estate and a seat in the Aldething. He was sparing of sacrifice, in the way of men that have travelled much and made acquaintance with many gods; but on the coming of Christianity he took from his chest a handsome cross with the trader's friend, Christ in the crown of thorns, fastened on it, and likewise an image of God's Mother, who is the kind lodestar of seafaring merchants.

In the north of this region, at Isafjord Deep, the Jökulfjords and Strands, Vermund Thorgrimsson, the master of Vatnsfjord, had power. He was an old-fashioned heathen man, who traced his descent from Norse chiefs. He drew an abundant living from rents paid in kind, and was always well stocked with butter. He himself was an active farmer employing many labourers, and a shrewd, but rather hard man. He had known many women, and some he had taken to bed without form. Some of these came to visit him at holiday times, and there were good matches among them, yet none to compare with the woman he had lawfully married, Thorbjörg the Big. But of her there is more to be read in other books, for she has little to do in this story.

It was about the time these two Westfjord chiefs came to power that Jarl Hakon Sigurdsson's rule began in Norway; and when that country had been subdued by the Danish king, on the fall of Olaf Tryggvason, Thorgeir and Thormod were half-grown lads in the Westfjords.

Of the champion Thorgeir's father, Havar Kleppsson, it is

enough to know that he had a little croft, Glacier Spring by name, at Mjoafjord in Isafjord Deep, where he was neighbour to the yeoman of Vatnsfjord. In the early years of Olaf the Stout, the Northmen's viking cruises west over sea began to look up again, after several generations of ebb. But these were other times, when but very few got a living by them. It is told of Havar that he came home a beggar from viking cruises, and that he and his mates, landless fellows like himself, went to Vermund and asked him for means of support. Vermund took some into his employ, and made others copyholders. Of Havar's great and good deeds on viking cruise there are no accounts but his own; but the talk was that he thought cheaply of sweating on the land compared with the fearless and noble-minded sweat of battle, and held it a more becoming thing to kill men than to haul fish out of the sea, notwithstanding the only weapon he had left when he came home from his foraying was a club. Havar's wife was named Thorelf. She was near akin to Thorgils Arason of Reykjaholar, a discreet and strong-minded woman, who knew by heart most of what has been sung in the North on heroes of old and the kings that won lands in war.

Goodman Havar soon had the name of an unquiet neighbour. He butchered folk's cattle that were so hairy as to stray on his land, and cut off the heads of their fowls and geese when he could come at them. If the owners raised ado, he would make at them with his club. Then most would run for their lives, but many went and complained to Vermund. While goodman Havar was out at work, at home his son Thorgeir would be listening to his mother's lays, and she opened to him the only world champions make account of, where helm-crowned heroes predominate over other folk and serve noble kings and slay malefactors and wizards or meet their equals in holmgang, and their renown is the same whether they win or fall. When Havar came home at night, he would tell his son how he had once fought twelve berserks in Denmark single-handed; sometimes he had only killed three when the others fled, sometimes they all had to bite the grass under his sword. It varied from night to night. He

would also relate how he had dispatched the berserk Soti in holmgang east of Osel. That was a long yarn. Further, good-man Havar had fought in eighteen battles west of the great sea as one of King Adils of Uppsala's men. There were many parts in that chronicle. Thorgeir soon saw that his father could be compared with the greatest champions in his mother's stories.

Of the wrangling between Havar Kleppsson and the men of Isafjord Deep, this book has only to say that a time came when Vermund thought he had ignored grievances long enough. He appointed a meeting with Thorgils Arason, and said his thingfolk could not call their poultry their own with Havar about, and the man was akin to Thorgils through his wife. He would advise finding him land somewhere else.

'It is bad,' said he, 'when men come back from foraying empty-handed, settle in a peaceful district, and begin chopping the heads off other folk's poultry as amends for the famous deeds it was not given them to do abroad.'

Thorgils Arason took this in good part. He said he had heard about Havar Kleppsson, and it was most unlucky that such a discreet woman as his kinswoman Thorelf should have made such a bad match.

Thorgils thought it would be asking for trouble to have this connection in Breidafjord, in his own shire, so at the next Aldething he bought Havar a small parcel of land in Borgarfjord, saw to a roof over his head and found him in stock. And that summer Havar went to live south of Hafnarfell, on the croft which has since been called Havarstead.

It soon appeared that the Borgarfjord men were ill pleased at Havar Kleppsson's coming. In Borgarfjord are broad, good farms and many great folk. They consulted together on how best to defend so noble a countryside from such plagues as being saddled with the mischievous riff-raff of other provinces.

Now at Skeljabrekka north of Hafnarfell there lived at this time a man named Jödur; his father's name was Klœing. Of Jödur it is told that he would rarely be far to seek when there was anything afoot in his district. He did not forbear many; some he killed and paid no fines for them, for there

were chiefs at his back. He had a lean little croft, and it was hard to say how he kept body and soul together; but he owned a fine stallion.

Havar Kleppsson had few men and little stock. He had a red jade, that he had brought from the west country, and this nag liked the infield and farmyard better than the fell.

Now one day in autumn it happened that goodman Jödur was on his way to Akranes with his half-grown son and a farm servant, to buy meal. And as they were baiting near Havarsstead, Havar swung a rattle out in the yard, with such hideous din that the stallion broke loose and bolted off up the fell.

By the dike stood Havar's red nag with its jaw dropping, three parts asleep.

Jödur said: 'Take that jade and tie him behind the rear horse. I have my meal to get home.'

His son and the farmhand did as they were told.

On their way back to Skeljabrekka in the evening, they drove their packhorses laden with meal past the dike round Havar's land. Havar was out of doors. He immediately recognised his nag under the Skeljabrekka men's sacks, took the cudgel he had brought home from the wars and came down the field to them.

He said: 'Now you can give that horse back. You are hardy to take a man's beast under his very nose without asking leave. I was not used to such japes when I lived in the Westfjords.'

Jödur replied: 'What we hear is that you were turned out of the Westfjords for scathe and poultry-stealing, and it is a sight to see one that has just come into Borgarfjord putting on airs with the local men.'

When Havar heard that, he took out a knife, cut his nag loose from the file, and began leading it up to the farm with the meal-sacks on it. Jödur bade the others come with him and said he would try to bring down the conceit of this foreigner, who seemed in a mind to steal flour from Borgarfjord men. With that they left the packhorses to themselves, and rode upon Havar in a clump. Jödur dealt the back of his head a staggering blow with an axe, and Jödur's son Grim thrust

a spear into his side, both at the same time. Havar sank down as he was leading his nag. Jödur Klæingsson jumped off his own horse, and in the way of Northmen set about the fallen man with his axe, till blood and brains were spurting out on all sides. Havar Kleppsson was as good as dead long before Jödur Klæingsson left off.

When goodman Jodur thought he had done enough, he ordered his man to take Havar's horse and put it back on the string of packhorses, for true fighting-men think it a poor killing if there is no booty thrown in.

'My son and I will go and publish the killing,' said he.

Thorgeir Havarsson had been sitting on the field-dike, watching his father being killed. When the job was finished, Jödur Klæingsson rode up to the boy and said:

'Go home, lad, and tell your mother that now your father has done scaring our Borgarfjord horses with rattles.'

With that Jödur Klæingsson rode away. It was near sunset. The boy got up, went to where his father was lying across the path and looked at the body. From the head was welling a porridge of blood and brains, and every lineament had been wiped out by the axe. One arm gave a jerk at the shoulder as he went limp, and that was his last sign of life. The boy wondered that his father should die so easily, when he had fought berserks in Denmark and harried Ireland with fire and sword. He had thought of his father as one of the greatest champions in the North. Thorgeir Havarsson stood there a long time, before going to tell his mother about it. At last he went home. He was then seven years old.

★ 2 ★

Vermund had a kinsman named Bessi Halldorsson. He dwelt at Laugabol, the neighbouring farm to Vatnsfjord. Bessi was skilled in the law and could make verse. He was a popular man, though of small means. He was not only akin to Vermund but his friend, and was often seen in his company, both when Vermund rode to the Thing and at other times. At the beginning of this story Bessi's wife was dead; but he had a little son whose name was Thormod, who was soon found to have a quick wit and a sharp tongue. He learnt songs and other lore from his father, and even as a child was well up in all that is told of the kings and jarls who have been best in the North at battle and other noble pastimes, as well as of Gods, Volsungs, Ylvings and those renowned heroes who wrestled with witches. He knew also of the raptures it was granted men to enjoy with women in the first ages of the world, when Brynhild slept on the mountain. Further, he could tell of swans that came flying from the south, lighted on a ness, threw off the swanskin and spun fates for men. And he knew the lays of strange power that fore-tell the World's end and Ragnarok.

But Thormod Bessason wearied in his father's house; he was drawn to junketing and kettles of meat, weddings, funerals or Yule-revels, and to places where men were fishing or doing some other work in company. Then he would be set to beguile the time, for in the west country the winter is long and the darkness thick. He soon learnt to add matter of his own, when his stock ran out. Even in youth he could make such good verse that his lays were not to be told from those of other skalds.

At Vatnsfjord Vermund had a great household and many

thralls, and both starveling and wolf's-head found their way there. Travellers and guests came from all over the Westfjords to open themselves to Vermund and seek his advice. Thormod soon had constant resort to Vatnsfjord. It was merrier there, he thought, than at his own home. He was welcomed with opened arms by a number of Vermund's men and maids, but was not in favour above the salt. In the hall they would sit up late, feasting on what the boy found to tell.

A woman from the Jökulfjords, whose name was Coalbrow, had come on a visit with her little daughter, who was named Geirrid. Coalbrow hailed from Norway; she had landed in Iceland with seafaring men, and gone to lodge with Vermund over the winter, along with her husband, who had been master of the ship. The Norseman died suddenly that winter, and it was thought that Coalbrow herself had made away with him. Then Vermund had no little solace of her for a time; but when the chief in his old age took a young woman, he parted from Coalbrow and gave her a dwelling-place in Ravensfjord, one of the most desolate of the Jökulfjords. He let her have a Norse thrall named Shaghair, a warlike man of few words with long hair and beard and shaggy eyebrows; he was not given to looking up, but some would have it that they had seen his eye to be sharp as a snake's, when he did happen to lift his eyes. Mother and daughter often rode to Isafjord Deep at hay-harvest to see old friends, and Shaghair would walk before their horses. Moreover he had charge of a good sword, which belonged to Coalbrow, but it was her habit to take it from him when they came where there was drinking. There were not many who could match Coalbrow in trials of strength. She was a portly woman, but with a handsome face and the most beautiful of black eyes. She had a name for malice, if she was crossed in anything, and harshness to those who did not please her, especially her lovers. So it was that men would rather jest with her than seek her to wife, and, besides, she had nothing.

Once Thormod had sat long in the hall at Vatnsfjord, regaling the housefolk after their day's work with lays of glorious kings, famous fights and many a good manslaying. But as

often when it grows late, they had more mind to hear of the love granted to men of old by shield-maidens.

Then a man spoke up: 'It is strange that we must be forever hearing of Sigrun on her way to the mound to kiss the dead Helgi, or Loki lying between Freyja's thighs, or the tale of Sigurd finding the warrior-maid asleep on the mountain, slitting her mail-coat to the crotch and lying with her before she wakes up; but never a good love-stave on the women who are now of mark in the Westfjords. I should think it more fitting to hear what could be sung about the housewife of Ravensfjord. For they say she takes her thrall Shaghair into bed twice a year, the first time when there are nine days left of winter and the raven has eggs, and a second time when summer is on the wane and the hay has been garnered.'

Many chimed in at this and said skalds ought not to neglect such a glorious housewife as Coalbrow of Ravensfjord. But at that time songs about women were hurtful to their fame and credit. It was an unseemly act to make verse on a woman, and her kin had the right to avenge it with slaying.

'I know little of love-verse,' said the skald Thormod, 'and why dishonour a woman who has done us no harm?'

The folk in the hall said there was no need to bring the woman's name into his verse, it would still be plain enough.

Coalbrow of Ravensfjord snorted at the talk, and said the only men that made love-songs were those who could give women no other sport.

Thormod said: 'My father, Bessi Halldorsson, has told me it does not become a true man to make verses on women and love. That is only for milksops and weaklings, who lie in the kitcheningle sucking gravy.'

That night there was no more talk at Vatnsfjord, and all went to their beds.

But next night after supper, Thormod stood up and asked a hearing; he said he had made a lay on Coalbrow of Ravensfjord, as he had been challenged to do.

Many had forgotten the jest of the night before, and it was not taken up again with the same glce. Bedtime had been late, and now tired limbs and full bellies were making folk

sleepy. Yet there were some who attended to the lay, and it won Thormod the nickname of Coalbrowsskald. But there were women who said Coalsows-skald would be a better name, and that was what they would choose for him, when they heard him talked of thereafter. Little can now be told of the song Thormod made for that woman in his youth. In most books it is torn out, or has been scraped out. There must have been some long ago who thought the song was not wholly decent. Likely there was more of boyish impudence in it than of ripe intent, as when grown men turn to verse because they love one who is denied them. However, in most books it is written that Coalbrow of Revensfjord neither blamed nor praised the song. But as the boy was on his way to the outhouse where Vermund lodged beggars, rogues and dogs, he brushed up against the post behind which lay mother and daughter from Ravensfjord. Coalbrow was lying on the outside and the daughter beyond her against the wall. Coalbrow told the boy to stop.

‘How old are you, Thormod skald?’ asked she.

He named his age, and some hold that it was then fourteen years, but others say twelve.

Suddenly she pulled the skald up into her bed, and it is believed that the lad had never known there was so much woman in the world.

‘It is not comely,’ says she, ‘for young a man to set on women with rhymes, from which we have least defence. And it passes all in the World, that such a cub should make a woman his laughing-stock. We women think it more than disgrace enough to suffer be-rhyming from those that have more man in them than you. This time it shall hold good, that words put works to shame. From this hour you shall not escape me. Thus I pay the song. When you are a man, you shall be drawn perpetually to my stead, aim where you will, and never shall you be nearer me than the day you set your course furthest from mine.’

And having spoken these words, she let the skald go for that time.

Thorgeir Havarsson's mother Thorelf came from Hordaland in Norway. That country is harsh and poor, and it had long been customary that the sons who could not thrive at home should go off to other lands to raise wealth by rapine, some in the east, and others west over sea ; in Hordaland such men as had never been aviking were held cheap. And yet there were none that could tell more mettlesome tales of vikings' manhood, of fights and voyages, than those who stayed at home, and the most deeply-versed were the nursemaids. In lovely rhymes they glorified vikings and valour, true manhood and hardihood, which menfolk air in far countries, but the more seldom, the nearer they approach women. Such lessons in tender age were all the Hordaland crofters' sons got from their mothers as provision when they left home. And Thorelf likewise had little to lavish on her son but stories of champions of old, and praises of victorious kings, winning the friendship of bustling crofters' sons by their liberality, and rewarding noble heart with heavy gold rings.

Never did it pass Thorelf's lips that a viking from Hordaland such as Havar Kleppsson had fallen by the field-dike, without raising a hand to help himself. She spoke of him always as a dauntless champion, who had wasted many lands with fire and fought in the front rank when glorious kings met in battle. Of his father, Thorgeir heard only how he had stood in the front of war. The boy could perceive that kings had owed all to his father, and relied on him in the hour of fate. In Havar, what skalds write of the tree of blood and iron and the panic-striker had been made flesh. Thorelf taught her son that babbling is the sign of infants in law, and

women who get their bread from door to door. Words are good for nothing, but in the praises due to kings, swords and fight. A hero commonly keeps his mouth shut, lets fall neither praise nor blame, and never utters a word he is not at all times ready to prove with arms. All answers are idle except the words of truth that swords speak. By a man's gifts for contention, his courage and cunning he is to be judged. Whether he has a longer or shorter span, whether he stands or falls in fight is no matter, if the light of glory fall on his deeds. It is the brooch of manhood to be as intrepid when fighting against odds as when hewing down a helpless enemy by surprise. It is the stamp of honour to bear provocation from none and to avenge insult, to drive cold friends into certain enmity and to strike first. Thorgeir's mother said that a true fighting-man ought to show most fealty to the king who was the most open-handed. Luck followed such a king. But he was to be deserted if he ran short of gold. Never should a true fighting-man bring on himself the shame of having chosen peace, when there was strife to be had. His mother also said that a true fighting-man never spared women or children on a foray. And whoever followed this counsel, his name would live on the tongues of men as long as the Midgard snake lay in chains.

In all her poverty, Thorelf cherished the lad as best she could. She waited on him as though he were a high-born, long-expected and surpassingly welcome guest, with the honour and fortune of the family in his hand. She kept for him the few dainties such a place had to offer. If she found strawberries on the fellside, she would take them home for him. She never set him to work, but taught him that farm labour was for clowns, and fishing for thralls. However, she let him practise steering and sailing a ship, for that is the means to reach foreign countries.

It was Thorelf's greatest grief that the only weapon she had to give her son was Havar's club. And when Thorgeir asked why such a champion as his father had no good weapons, Thorelf replied that he had lost his sword in a shipwreck.

It is held that though Frankish swords have nowhere been more belauded than in Icelandic song, yet when the oath-brothers were growing up there was such black poverty in the country that hardly any had serviceable weapons except the rich, who bought them abroad from vanity or received them as gifts from great chiefs.

When Thorgeir Havarsson was twelve winters old, his mother sent him to her kinsman Thorgils at Reykjaholar, so that the boy might learn the manners of a chief's household. There was no great joy at Reykjaholar when horse-copers from the south delivered the boy. Thorgils Arason owned many farms and a ship trading over seas; he had not time to look after the kinsman who was being dropped on him, but told his women-servants that this new guest would live with the farm hands.

Next morning the foreman said Thorgeir was to go with the other boys to feed the pigs. Thorgeir answered shortly, but sat all the faster. He dug in his heels, and took no notice when he was set to anything.

When Thorgils heard that his kinsman was work-shy, he sent for him and said the men were finding him rather heavy in hand.

'Shall I find you some work myself?' asked he.

Thorgeir replied: 'My mother never said I was to feed pigs.'

'Then what did she think you ought to do?' asked Thorgils.

'Kill with weapons,' replied Thorgeir Havarsson.

'And who is to be the sufferer?' asked Thorgils.

'You have no need to ask that,' said Thorgeir.

'And your mother has no need to be told that your father's killing was atoned long ago, and the Borgarfjord men paid a fine for it,' said Thorgils. 'Besides, we are not much for killing. Those days are past when warfare got men their bread.'

'I can hear that you are a paltry chief,' said Thorgeir Havarsson. 'I shall go home to Borgarfjord.'

'There is no sense in that,' said Thorgils. 'If you have a disgust at pigs, you can go where the men are flying seals or flensing whales, or where they are smelting bog iron and

burning charcoal. Or you can go and see how iron is forged; we have good smiths here. And now we are minded to put up a church for Christ, that lord who is reckoned the emperor's peer in the countries where we have our trade. We do not desire his friendship the less, because his mother is a staunch friend to all seamen, and worth a great deal more than your mother, our kinswoman Thorelf. Go to the men who are hewing church-timber, and use a saw or a plane. Or will you carry loads for the merchants on my ship? There are many men here, both old and young, at gainful work. But we can get nothing by clash of arms.'

The feeling between the two kinsmen was somewhat chill, and it grew no better. Thorgils, however, warned his foremen not to provoke or tease the boy. Thorgeir went on as before. He had no will to be useful and was at few pains to recommend himself. But when smiths were beating the red-hot iron, he gave a willing hand with the bellows. And at times he got leave to hold the sledge. Thorgeir took a great fancy to iron. When he found rusty scraps on the path, he took them home, put them in his bed and slept on them. It was customary to weigh out fish and butter to the servants for a whole week. Thorgeir would get the men to trade iron for his butter. A hero, he said, did not eat butter—'Iron is more to our taste.' He felt himself drawn to those who could use weapons, turned up wherever sports were going on, and soon had his place in many games. Never did his looks reveal either content or displeasure, and he was never seen to be merry like other lads.

One day, about the time when the lambs are weaned and haymaking begins, a troop of men rode in from the north. It was Vermund Thorgrimsson of Vatnsfjord on his way to the Aldething. Vermund stayed the night with Thorgils at Reykjaholar. These two chiefs, dividing the Westfjords between them, were on good terms. Bessi Haldorsson was with his kinsman Vermund as usual. Thormod Bessason had come along as a horseboy, and early next morning he was called to look to the horses. The sun was ~~sun~~ in the north, dew lay on the fields, the sea shone and white vapours were

drifting over the hot spring in the hush of night. And as he stood looking from the door with sleep-heavy eyes, he saw in the yard a lad, with a shark-knife in a belt round his waist, a heavy meataxe over his shoulder and a pot-lid as a shield. This being was as scantily clad as he was well armed. Thormod was holding only an old whip and a bridle. All his drowsiness fled away, when he caught sight of a lad no older than himself, weaponed on so sweet a morning as this; he went up and scanned him thoroughly, as he stood there under arms. But the weapon-bearer did not offer to speak to the guest, and paid him no heed.

Thormod greeted him and asked: 'Why do you watch through the night hours, comrade, when most men reckon there is nothing so delicious as sleep?'

The fighting-man answered: 'I can get no sleep, for wondering where the men may be who are worthy that I should kill them.'

Thormod asked: 'Are you he that is to avenge his wrong?'

Thorgeir replied: 'I am not so sure of that, as I am sure you must be that Thormod who climbed into the old woman's bed. It is beyond folk why you rhymed about a dishonest hag, instead of glorifying those maids from the South who sail the winds of the World like swans and choose men fates.'

Thormod said: 'That lay need not hinder us from putting your deeds into verse, when they are blown abroad, and for my youth's sake I could do no service to a woman but rhyming.'

Thorgeir replied: 'When you learn that we have done such deeds as you hold it not unfitting to praise in a lay, we will be your friend.'

'Have I leave to handle your weapons, comrade?' asked Thormod.

'My arms could be better,' said Thorgeir. 'I myself turned this into an axe, but the time will come when I shall move a king to give me a Frankish sword.'

'Have you chosen a king?' asked Thormod.

'I will back that king, who with greatest slaughter and noblest heart lays the North under him,' said Thorgeir.

'It seems to me,' said Thormod, 'that with you, Thorgeir Havarsson, a great champion has come into the World. Therefore I vow that when you have done the first famous deed worthy the gift of Odin, I will come wherever you may be and sing of you in a lay, and thenceforth we shall not part again, but together seek out the king who is then the noblest of ring-breakers, and offer to back him.'

Of the words they spoke at that time we have no more in writing.

★ 4 ★

At Ögur in Isafjord Deep lived a widow whose husband had been lost at sea. She was named Katla and was a woman of substance. When this story begins, she had a little daughter, Thordis, and from her mother she was called Thordis Katlasdaughter. Among Katla's folk was a Norseman named Skati. He had missed his ship, and come to Ögur as a foreman. He was a go-ahead man, and soon rose to be farm bailiff. Skati had the name of a hard driver, and was ill liked by servants and thralls. Many said he would not be satisfied with his wage from Katla, till it was for his own profit that the farm grew in wealth.

Skati was a great talker. He had many tales of foraying, and often spoke of his courage in war. He had followed sea-kings on viking cruise, and they had won many frays, both in the east and in Ireland.

Thordis delighted in hearing Skati's tales, and so he would often take the child on his knee, clasping her round the ankle, when he was in the widow's bower of an evening.

Skati told of vikings descending on unknown lands, where they burned homes to the ground and slaughtered all men-folk who might be dangerous, as well as old folk, infants and other worthless beings. Yet no booty was more profitable than living women, for whom silver could be got in England and Denmark. Skati also told of battles in which the luck swayed to and fro till all were dead but himself and a king, and of how at last they were taken and thrown into a pit in chains, and then they had no hope but the faeries, or those grand women abroad who are called princesses. Often the girl was asleep on the viking's lap, before Skati and the king had been saved from the dungeon. It pleased her to fall asleep listening to the man she thought undoubtedly the greatest champion in the North.

At Ögur there was a young thrall of Irish birth named Kolbak. Katla's husband had bought him abroad on one of his voyages, ten winters old. Since then seven winters had passed. Kolbak was red-haired and squint-eyed, rather short of stature, but well-made, broad-shouldered and narrow in the waist, with supple limbs and small hands. He had no great strength, yet did his work better than the stoutest. The fish thronged to his bait, and he was nimbler than any at rounding up sheep and cattle on the fell. Kolbak jested with none of his own accord, but made cheerful and jesting answers if he were spoken to. When he was alone his face clouded, as though he were brooding on a matter unknown to others.

It vexed some of the freemen to have a thrall who was little more than a child doing most kinds of work quicker and better than themselves. They wearied of fishing beside a thrall and getting no bite, while he landed fish after fish, or watching him bound up sheer fellsides they had no heart for. Often he came in for rough usage from those that envied him. In particular, bailiff Skati had a grudge at the Irish lad. The Norseman could not forget that Northern chiefs, great-hearted magnates, had been driven from Ireland and were now in Iceland whacking cows on the rump; that the kingdom they had conquered by manhood and placed

under law and justice was overthrown, and that such good men as were not killed or driven away had had to bend the neck under Irish heels. It was only fair, thought Skati, that the thrall Kolbak's hide should pay for some of his folk's dealing with the Northmen they had got rid of.

When Thordis was very little she thought it sport to see Kolbak ill-used, and would laugh gleefully, as children do at the hurt of others. Skati was no less happy to content the girl. He was always on the look-out for something in Kolbak's work to find fault with. The thrall had only to snap a tooth of his rake in dry weather when they were busy haymaking, and he would have Skati on him, hurling him to the ground and heaping gibes on him. The rest thought it improper for Northmen to take a thrall's part over a beating, and most of them looked the other way. But the only laughter was from children.

In time the girl became more self-willed and harder to please. She no longer found it so merry to see thralls beaten, but aspired in due course to finer pastimes.

The talk ran in Isafjord Deep that Bessi's son Thormod skald was shooting up, a credit to Laugadal and delighting all with song; that chiefs were giving him their friendship and women their favour. Further it was told, that there was come to Reykjaholar a son of that Havar Kleppsson of Isafjord whom the Borgarfjord men killed. His name was Thorgeir, and even now in youth he was such a champion that he was in iron day and night and never opened his mouth. Brisk men were said to have all they could do to match him at games and exercise, and it was believed the faeries had great renown in store for this lad.

It happened one day in early summer that men had come to Ögur from Hornstrands to buy stallions. Kolbak had been sent up the fells to drive the herd down. And as folk stood at the pen waiting for the horses to come down to them, the finest of all the colts started aside, broke into a shrill rutting-cry and headed for the fell. Kolkak gave chase for a while, but at last turned back, since a rider could not follow the stallion's path up the mountain.

By the pen were not only the folk from Hørnstrands, but a crowd of men, women and children looking on, and the sun glistened on the fat horses, that had newly cast their winter shag. Katla's daughter Thordis was there with the other women.

Kolbak had lost hope of the stallion and turned back without it. And as he was riding towards the pen, Skati rushed to meet him, seized the reins, dragged the boy from horseback, felled him with a blow on the ear, pulled the clothes up over his head, tore the whip from his hand, plied it again and again on his bare back, and finally hurled it at him as he lay on the ground.

Norse Skati was a man of great courtesy, a handsome man, noble of stature, with fair hair and the most beautiful eyes.

Of Kolbak it is to be said, that he got up when he was sure Skati had beaten his fill, quickly pulled on his trousers, rather red in the face with a boy's modesty, and smiled sheepishly at those that had witnessed the onslaught. Then the horse-cheapening began again.

It was late when Thordis went home. She and her play-fellows had been merry over the horses the livelong day, and the flogging quickly passed from their minds. Towards evening, Kolbak and an aged man had rowed out to fish, and they had just come ashore as Thordis was walking home over the green. Kolbak was holding a string of fish he had caught. The girl stood still on the green and began talking to him:

'Why do you chase horses and make away with fish, Kolbak? It would be fitter for you to become a hero and skald.'

'I am a thrall,' said he.

'How is it,' she asked, 'that a man as proper as you can be a thrall, for others to beat as they like?'

'Heroes and skalds sought me out in Ireland,' said he.

'Why do you not cry when you are beaten?' asked the girl.

'I do not cry, little woman,' said he—and he had laid his

fish on the grass while he was speaking with her—'I do not cry, because heroes and skalds burned my house. They hewed my father down in the field, and feeble old grandfather got a spear through him. Grandmother was on her knees lauding her guardian pirit, the blessed Columkill, when a man smashed her skull with the bright axhead. And therefore I do not cry. They took my baby brother, unwound his swaddling-clothes and tossed him naked from spear-point to spear-point. My mother and my little sister they dragged sobbing aboard the ship. And so, little woman, I do not cry.'

The girl eyed Kolbak for a while, but she said no more. Presently she went away.

★ 5 ★

Next day Norse Skati entered the mistress's bower and laid good silver before her.

'That is what I got for you by the horse-dealing,' said he.

'You are a jewel,' said the woman. 'Sit down, and you shall have something tasty.'

She beat eggs, mixing them with wine and honey. The daughter of the house stood by the window, looking out. She had pushed back the horn shutter and was listening to the birds. She did not turn round when the Norseman came in.

He said: 'What is amiss tonight with Freyja the Fair, that she has no smile for her own viking Skati? Will she disdain to sit on his warrior-lap? We had not finished the story of how I once fought with the Wends, and they had put me in chains.'

The girl said nothing.

Then Katla spoke up: 'Sit on your foster-father's lap, child, as you have done so often, and do not be mopish or cross-grained. That is no humour for little girls.'

The girl replied: 'You shall have your way, mother. And indeed you have most to lose. For my part I am weary of being stroked like a child.'

Skati laughed, took the girl on his lap and kissed her. Then he began to relate how the Wends had once made him prisoner and put him in chains. The story dwelt much on a place of evil dreams, a dark and foul dungeon, with lizards, toads and other poisonous vermin swarming all over the floor and walls, some of them hairy. But a champion may not own to fear, even when telling of the worst places he has been in. Skati therefore contented himself with saying it ~~had~~ been a tedious abode. Then he came up to a strange noise he seemed to hear in the dark, and when in his shackles he edged over and laid his ear to the wall, he could make no better of it than that a harp was being played deep underground, and a woman singing to it in a voice of wondrous beauty.

On other nights it had always made the girl sleepy to sit on the Norseman's knee, leaning her head against him and feeling his clasp of her ankles as he told on. Now she sprang out of his arms with a yell, shook her fists at him in fury and called him the vilest names.

Her mother asked her the cause of this passion.

She said: 'He laid hold of my knee.'

Katla stopped beating the eggs and looked at her bailiff.

He said: 'I did not know she felt as a woman. This is the first time she has made ado about where I put my hand.'

'Lay your paw where it is more welcome,' said Thordis. 'And let me alone. Now I am going to Kolbak. He is more of a man than you.'

When the girl had left the room, Katla said to the Norseman:

'Now it has come to light that my daughter is marriageable, and it is some time since I was pleased with all your cuddling of her. Now she feels what I could not see, that

it is her you will be after if you are here long enough, Trickster!’

And with that she raised the whisk she had been using to beat eggs and honey, and struck the viking over his nose and mouth.

The thrall sat on the field-dike with his dog. It was one of his tasks to drive the sheep off the infield at night. The girl came and sat down beside him, looked down and tore up grass. He asked what was her will. She raised her head slowly, looked him in the eyes and said:

‘I desire a small service of you.’

He asked what it was.

She said: ‘I would have you kill Skati.’

‘I did not think you loved him so dearly,’ answered the thrall Kolbak.

She asked what that nonsense should mean.

He replied: ‘I have heard from my kin that when a Northern woman loves a man above all the world, she first woos a manslayer with embraces to kill her beloved by stealth, and then takes the killer in marriage.’

She laughed and said: ‘It may be true that we women choose the suitor we love least, if there are two at hand. Yet we may also have this ground for killing those we love, that they grow fonder of other women. But I am not sure of loving Skati so well that I would take any man to husband who made away with him. I am only sick of listening to his slaughter of Wends and Kurs, while mother sits by with her cheeks reddening, waiting for his tales to send me to sleep. It has come to this, that I like him the worse the more he talks, and now I am resolved that if any is to lay hold of my kneec, you shall be the man.’

‘I will attempt neither one nor the other,’ said the thrall Kolbak, ‘neither to lay hold of your kneec, nor to kill your Norseman, and forfeit my life to no earthly good.’

‘Will you let him beat you,’ asked the girl, ‘and never lift your neck?’

‘What matter if I am beaten?’ said he. *‘Better to live and thrive, man alive gets the cow.’*

'That is not song for a hero,' said the girl. 'Where did you learn it?'

'When we are out in the boat, I learn of old Grinnir. His songs are not so fierce as to keep the fish away. *Halt bestrides horses, handless can herd.*'

She replied: 'I have a mind to be taught those verses and any you know besides. And for the Norseman, you need not kill him unless you will.'

'Why should I make bold to teach you verses?' said he.

She said: 'Would you have me go back and tell Skati that a champion ought to stick men with a sword, not beat them with a whip?'

'You rule your own words, little woman,' said he. 'You shall rule me to nothing but what becomes a man taken in war.'

She said: 'My mother has had a loft built for me, and the embrasure looks out on the fell, but the frame will not move. I would have a loose shutter, as mother has in her bower, so that I can push it back when I will. I desire you to loosen the frame and make me a sliding-shutter, so that I can hear the birds of an evening.'

He said: 'Suppose birds of prey flew in?'

'It is nothing to you,' said she, 'what flies in through my window-hole. Only I am sick of using the common door when night falls.'

'I never guessed you to be a night-hag,' said he, 'a fair woman like you.'

'It appears in everything, that you set no store by my friendship and are bent on plaguing me,' said the girl, and she was not far from tears.

But then she looked up, eyed him austere and raised her voice.

'I would have a sliding-window in my loft,' said she, 'so that I may slip out with my web and fly through the air to a beach I know of, where there are young champions; one is beating iron into a sword, the other tracing pictures of olden time on his shield. There on a ness I mean to work them fates.'

He replied: 'I will loosen the window of your loft, for you to fly out and choose them fates.'

★ 6 ★

One day Thorgeir Havarsson sought speech with his kinsman Thorgils in the chief's hall at Reykjaholar. Strapped round his waist was a paltry sword, and he held a spear in his hand and a shield in front of him. He came to a halt before his kinsman, and fixed on him such a look as was then called fell.

'Do you not greet your kin?' asked Thorgils Arason, laughing at him. 'Or am I to get up and serve your worship?'

'Greeting seems to me a petty custom,' said Thorgeir Havarsson. 'And you need not stint your laughing at me. You are a mighty man and have the upper hand in our kindred.'

Thorgils said it was certainly a great honour for the family tree to have borne a sprig like Thorgeir.

'Shall we talk with arms in hand?' said he.

Thorgils pulled down from the shelf a great and fair sword, drew it and levelled it as he sat. Thorgeir grew quite faint, with so stately a weapon before his eyes.

'Or shall we behave ourselves,' said Thorgils, 'and keep the peace while talking together?'

Thorgeir laid aside his weapons. Thorgils thrust his sword into the sheath and heaved it back on the shelf.

Thorgeir said: 'I have suffered your gibes here at Reykjaholar and for none so short a time, and many are like to say he is a not unpeaceable man who so long has borne the like. I have commonly been sent out to sleep with your hounds, and clothes I have had none, but by constraint from your thralls. The hour is at hand when I must give thanks

for the entertainment. I am going south to Borgarfjord.'

'What to do?' asked Thorgils Arason.

'I am to make payment for the winter keep of a lamb,' said Thorgeir. 'Mother does not think it well that we should be in debt to strangers.'

'That speech was plain before it was spoken,' said Thorgils Arason. 'And it is the simpletons on your father's side that have put it into your head to make a figure by manslaughter. A courtier of Christ from Rome told me when I was in Orkney that the Lord means to subvert life in arms and the foraying that goes with it, and procure men wealth and good luck by trade, benedictio, signings of the cross, church-building, estates, labourers and singing of anthems. You would be better off whittling timbers and planning altar-boards in the church I have lately been raising as an abode for Christ, than gadding south to kill men. Next winter I will have clerks to sing masses for us, and baptise all here who have been simpletons and petty-minded enough to shun so noble an entertainment.'

Thorgeir replied: 'I have heard from mother that many men of worth have challenged Whitechrist to holmgang, and he has never dared to do battle. He must be white-livered, and I would rather serve most other kings than him. Mother has also told me that the power flourishing in men and gods is called earth-power, and is compounded of the hardness of stone, the juice of herbs and grass and the ferocity dwelling in the wolf's tooth; and I do not believe Christ has this power in him; but other gods pined and withered away when it forsook them, and so it will be with men.'

Thorgeir Havarsson set out for Borgarfjord. He took nothing but his arms, and those were bad, and some poor garments. Winter came, and the waters froze. He reached Skeljabrœkka late in the evening, about bedtime. He knocked at the door. A farm-servant came out, asked who was there and bade the guest come indoors; but Thorgeir said he did not reveal his name to thralls nor enter a house at their bidding.

'Where is goodman Jödur?' said he.

'What do you want with him?' asked the man.

'I have to pay him for the winter feed of a lamb,' said Thorgeir.

The man went in, and said there was a stranger outside with a debt owing to goodman Jödur, but it seemed he would not come in at the bidding of inferiors. Jödur told his son to come with him, and they both had axes. They went to the door; but since there had been lights burning inside, father and son could distinguish nothing in the open air. But Thorgeir was used to the dark, and saw the goodman's shape in the doorway. With great vehemence he thrust his spear into Jödur's belly, and the goodman fell back into the arms of his son. Thorgeir immediately brought his axe down on the son's head, knocking his brains out. And when he had accounted for father and son in the doorway, and they were both lying senseless, he went on for some time using the axe on them, to make their death sure. For Northmen were in the habit of using their ill-forged, blunt weapons as flails, when they would not bite.

Thorgeir went his way the same night, when he was tired of threshing and thumping, and did not stop till he came to his mother's door at Havarsstead, in the first glimmer of dawn.

Thorelf bade her son welcome and asked his tidings, but there were none, he said.

'Did you go to Skeljabrekka?' she asked.

'The road runs by their infield,' said he.

'Did you have speech with any?' she asked.

'Not much of that,' said he, 'but my spear and my axe did.'

Then he bade her come with him into the light. There it could be seen that his clothes were bloody, and his weapons and hands stained. His face was spotted with blood, that had splashed up from the Skeljabrekka men's bodies as he belaboured them. And now he was ready to tell his mother about the killings. At this relation, Thorelf kissed her son warmly, called her servant and bade him

slaughter a lamb. She meant to make a feast for her son, she said.

The law enjoined that a killer should report his manslaughter before the sun had gone down, on pain of being held a murderer and outlaw. It bound him to go to the nearest habitation where he judged his life to be safe, and announce the killing to a man resident there.

'This place has neither men nor wealth enough to keep you against the Borgarfjord men for one day,' said Thorolf, 'but now eat your fill of lamb. The scraps you shall have as provision for the road. And get back as fast as you can to my kinsman Thorgils; there is a ship lying here from the Borgarfjord dales, and I will ask them to take you aboard, so that you may publish the killing to the first man you meet west of the Fens. In those parts it will be thought no great tidings. Then you must get a passage across Breidafjord to your kinsman at Reykjanes.'

There is nothing to relate of Thorgeir's journey westward to Reykjaholar; but Thorgils Arason drew down his brows when he saw his kinsman again. He thought Thorgeir's coming ill-omened.

'What have you been about?' he asked.

Thorgeir was not loath to reply that he had avenged his father.

'That matter was closed long ago with fines,' said Thorgils Arason. 'Am I to have suits for night-slaughter on my back all over the country for you, you simpleton?'

Thorgeir replied: 'Now I have shown what I can do with weapons, kinsman, though the blade be notched. And it is what my mother said, that I should kill men.'

'I have no doubt of that,' said Thorgils. 'There are none so full of viking mettle and fighting spirit as old wives among the cinders. In our day there seems little advancement in creeping into the clothes of long-dead Norse sea-kings, and far more in following the lord of Rome, who offers good men profit with peace. Yet it may well be said of your doings, that such a stupid fellow could do no other.'

These tidings were heard far and wide, and it was thought bravely done of a youth to have struck down in one night a champion like Jödur Klæingsson and to boot his son, a promising young man, and thus performed an old, sacred duty, that of avenging his father. It was not long till the rumour of Thorgeir's manly deed spread to Laugaból in Isafjord Deep. Thormod skald was moved by the deed, and sat down then and there to compose 'Thorgeir's Revenge', an ode of twenty stanzas. He asked his father's leave to go and drink Yule at Reykjaholar, and take his friend the lay. Bessi said that for the present Thormod might rule his own motions, but something told him they were not likely to be more profitable abroad than at home.

Thormod was nearly full-grown when he made his journey to Reykjaholar. At that time most men in Iceland were stunted and bow-legged, gaunt and swollen-jointed, knotty and twisted with gout, wrinkled and blue-faced. For it was a harsh land, whose folk were always toiling and moiling at sea or on the fells, and the vulgar did not feed fat. Thormod Coalbrowsskald was supple and slender in build, straight-legged and light of foot; he was fair-skinned with bushy brows, dark hair, and a body unmarked by toil in childhood. He had a friendly word for all and quick answers for women.

When Thormod came to Reykjaholar, he recited 'Thorgeir's Revenge', while all the housefolk gave ear. Yet none opened his mouth about the lay, but Thorgeir himself. He said it would never die as long as there were folk in the North, and grieved only for his poverty, which kept him from rewarding the lay after its merit, yet his friendship Thormod should have, while they both lived. But the two

friends did not seem to enjoy such applause from other folk as they gave each other.

Often, as they sat out of doors, they had in mind kings of old, hallowed to the gods: Ermanaric the king of the Goths, Helgi Hundingsbane and Sigurd Fafnirsbane, King Half's champions and sundry other men of mark; or it would happen that Norns flew by in swan-shape, stretching their necks and singing. And they listened to the strains, and part they thought concerned them. Eagles also flew by.

Often their talk fell on the pettiness of life in Iceland, where free men submitted to pulling fish out of the water and doddering after sheep, instead of raising wealth by war and good manslaying, or doing other deeds fit to be named in song, like their forefathers in Norway. They thought life worse than un-lived, if it were not to bring forth tidings worthy of being remembered by unborn generations. They called it unhard-of shame that this land should be kingless, without a man willing to raise an army and sail a longship. They agreed to lead the warrior's life and never regard what clowns and thralls thought of it, to look for enemies like true fighting men and win wealth by stoutness, never to endure provocation, and to spare none far or near who thought it in his power to bid them defiance or called himself their equal.

But here as in many a case, the roads were ill for one who had to make his own way, and it was not quite clear to them how they should reap that glory which was nearest their hearts. They thought one expedient would be to take ship with merchants, and seek out vikings or such kings as there was honour in serving, either east or west over seas. At that time there was no renowned king in Norway. Since the fall of Olaf Tryggvason the land had been ruled by Danish jarls, with some Norse yeomen that had the title of petty kings, but flourished by grace of the jarls and ate out of their hands. It did not seem to the Icelanders that there was much fame to be got in the old country. In Ireland the sway of Norse chiefs was tottering. Both the comrades came of folk who had settled there for a time, but had been driven out by the Irish. Many a Northman had felt it sour to leave the happy

land in the west, where manly mind had won him an empire, and be returning poor and cheerless to the land that rises in solitude from the furthest sea.

There came a day when the comrades sought out Thorgils Arason.

He asked what they had on their minds. They said:

'It seems to us idle to endure lack of name and fame here in Iceland. We are bent on more renown. We desire you to help us abroad to some chief who wishes for brisk men about him.'

Thorgils said: 'Nothing but mischief and bad luck ever comes of it, when killers and skalds get together. And landless men have more need to employ themselves in fishing and sealing than in weapon-rattling and bragging.'

'They said that in their opinion that was a slight answer, and no help in need.'

'If you have a mind to serve foreign chiefs,' said he, 'go before the king in whose honour I have built a mansion at Reykjaholar. And if you would serve a king, my advice is to serve him. He is so great a chief that even the Emperor of Byzantium does him homage. Now I will make a divorce between you and the dogs and lodge you with my priest.'

For some time it had been law that all in Iceland should be called Christian, and the rulers had made a pact with foreign chiefs and merchants to have the commonalty baptised; for this work they enrolled hedge-clerks and strolling bishops that traders had found rambling in foreign parts. The Pope had made known that Iceland was to be under the see of Bremen. But at that time it was rare in the North for a messenger to bear letters of credit, and besides the Pope had made a long stay in his dispatch of letters. Nor indeed had our countrymen learnt the Latin alphabet, and none could say for sure what portion in the archbishopric or Dominus Papa those clerks had, that traders brought back from the market-places of foreign towns. It availed little for these men to back up their pretensions with letters and signs, for at that time most letters passing from land to land were forged, and few could decipher them. And indeed preaching

the gospel among the heathen was in that age oftener carried on by adventurers and daredevils than by the true servants of Holy Church. In Iceland folk had no choice but either to take the strollers at their word or continue unbaptised. Not seldom these men of God proved to be banned homicides or thieves; some were English or Irish, others Saxon, but some called themselves Armenian; these were black and nasty and lay with all the women they could come at. For that matter they are said to have preached false doctrine. These clerks had often a troop of ruffians to give them a hand at baptism and mass, and the pillage, slaughter and other violence that went with them. So it went on, until good men of Borgarfjord opened a seminary at Bær and brought in Rudolf of Rouen, a worthy Frenchman, to teach our own clerks book-learning and chant. •

In those days the old religion was going downhill, and folk were turning towards the new; most of them let the old gods shift for themselves. Good chiefs vied with each other in building churches and baptising as many as was feasible, so as to enlarge their districts. They promised the poorest crofter manifold splendours in Heaven when he was dead, if he would only come to church to hear paternoster and be instructed on the warriors of Whitechrist.

But though paternoster and instruction in holy things were at first somewhat perverted for want of priests, and moreover gibberish in the mouths of foreign clerks, the great men laboured to attach bells and crosses to their churches for delight; some set up an image of the good warrior John the Baptist in the middle of the church, in the place Asa-Thor had filled at the heathen court. Irishmen and such as had lived among the Irish esteemed Patrick and Columkill or Columba above others in the Lord's host, and likewise Cecilia the fair and the little maids Sunniva and Belinda, for at that time the Virgin Mary was in less favour with the Pope than she has been since. It was thought too that a comely crucifix ought to hang on the gable wall of all churches, or above the door of the porch. Carvers were not yet in the habit of portraying the Redeemer naked, with a

joyless countenance and mean aspect, according to later custom ; they decked him in a splendid royal mantle down to the knee and courtly corduan hose, and set a tall imperial crown on his head ; both feet rested on a little slab on the cross, and he was stout of presence like a great yeoman, or cruel in the image of warrior-kings.

Many held that folk would be no worse off with Christ than with the gods they had brought from Norway, rumbling Thor, and King Frey of the great member and wicked Odin of Asgard, for those had been of least help when they were most needed. Many peasants said it cost a man nothing to believe in the ruler's choice of gods, if he remained free to worship the rocks or stones, knolls and cliffs, barrows and mounds his forefathers had gone into after their death. Yet others believed in their own strength and luck, and said they owed nothing but to themselves. And some believed in their breeding stock, stallion and bull, ram or boar, and some in the raven. They said that the gods had been reborn in these creatures. But those who had been abroad said it was far more profitable to deal with foreigners in peace than in arms, and trade with them as friends ; but this they could not do unbaptised, for Christians are forbidden to have commerce with heathens. With one voice they said that in foreign parts folk were thought simple unless they knew that White-christ wears the tallest gold crown among emperors ; even the high kings of Byzantium bent the neck under his heel.

Jörund the priest lodged in an outhouse at Reykjaholar. There was a wooden floor at the far end of it, where he had his bed. He was no more than twenty, and had kept sheep and got little schooling ; an English travelling bishop had ordained him priest in Thorgils' church, and taught him a few characters and an antiphona, to which he sang most of the verses that he knew and that were most needful to sing, as paternoster and credo. Jörund had a stole, or band stitched with gold, to lay over his shoulders when he was singing, and that served as a chasuble. He had also a ragged book Thorgils had bought for him, and in it the psalter was written, and at the back were loose leaves with strange stories,

and godly dialogues between St. Gregory and Peter the deacon. The end was lacking, but it was no matter, for Jörund the priest could not read, though he had long night-sittings over the book with much toil of brain.

The church was still poor and feeble in Iceland, without lands or bishopric of its own, to the disgust of youth. Yeomen's sons had no will to be clerks, for that humble folk were picked out, sons of freedmen, thralls or crofters, who ran the errands of church-building laymen, chanted to the best of their power, and were paid in fish and seaweed ; they might be chastised at pleasure like other servants if they neglected their work.

Jörund the priest was good-natured, weakly and insignificant, and his beard would not grow. He had carved a crucifix himself from a lump of wood. The Redeemer was mean-looking, with a paltry crown and thin fringe of beard. Gaunt and slack he hung on a cross, ruling over Heaven and Earth in a coarse weekday jerkin. There was just room on the god's body for the sword the Romans thrust into his heart. Jörund the priest had cut a wound in the wood and daubed it with red. Most thought that the image resembled the King of Heaven less than it did Jörund's father, who was a thrall.

The oath-brothers were to lie together in one bed and the clerk in another, but the parties had an ill eye to each other and exchanged few words at first. Thorgeir Havarsson was accustomed to sit up in bed at night instead of lying down to sleep ; he wore his shield on a thong as he slept, and had one hand on the handle, the other on his sword-hilt, and the axe in his lap. It was his belief that heroes never lay down, but slept in such postures.

Twice in the night it was the priest Jörund's duty to get out of bed, light a candle and sing psalterium for his friend Christ, son of Mary the pure, commemorate the Lord's entry into the womb, and repeat the words that the Archangel Gabriel and Queen Elizabeth, mother to God's warrior John the Baptist, spoke to the maid when she had conceived with virgin knot unbroken.

On their first night in the clerk's lodging, the friends were roused from sleep by shrill and high singing in Latin, and they took the nuisance somewhat amiss.

Thorgeir said: 'We have heard that Christ is craven in fight.'

The clerk finished his office, bowed his head low in prayer, and then asked: 'Are you unbaptised?'

They said they could not be sure what clerks might have been about with them before they could speak.

'Where was Whitechrist's greatest battle?' they asked.

Jörund the priest dived into his chest, took out the crucifix, held it up to them and said: 'This was his greatest fight; and this wound, from which blood and water flow, is his trophy.'

'There is little renown in dying without first killing. Did he fight any battle he could brag of himself?'

The priest said: 'He rose up from the dead and was never livelier than then. For though he suffered torment and death, no living creature could do him hurt, since in the beginning he had forged all himself, when young of years he was in the Kingdom of Heaven. He is so great a craftsman that he made the whole World out of nothing. Yet though his kingdom be good here on earth, it is like a bursting bubble to the kingdom he has in another world, where shines a light fairer than the sun.'

Thorgeir asked: 'How did he treat his enemies, when he had leapt from the gibbet?'

The clerk said: 'Though Christ was crucified by evil-doers and pierced with a spear, none could keep him in Hell longer than he would. He has made all men his sons, both good and evil. And so he is not angry with his work when it uses him ill, but has compassion on it.'

'How many women had he?' asked Thormod.

'Men's and women's souls sprang from his forehead in the Kingdom of Heaven and played at his feet, while he was enthroned in joy before the creation of the World,' said the priest.

Thorgeir said: 'My mother has told me that the only true

words are those that ride on swords, and the only great man is he that takes the life of every enemy he has conquered, or makes him a thrall.'

'Greater was the victory of the Virgin's son,' said the clerk, 'when he made all mankind his peers, than that of the kings who laid men under the yoke of thralldom; and it was greater when in the beginning he made souls for men, and lavished the same stuff on king and thrall, than it is to attack and do them to death.'

Thorgeir said: 'Never did Christ or any other wizard make our mother Thorelf a soul, and yet she bore an undaunted son.'

'It is written in holy books,' said Jörund, 'that old Loki, whom we clergy and good yeomen call Lucifer, lured souls to him with wicked stratagems and snared them with falsehood. And when the souls of men began to busy themselves with night-slaying and other murders, and married women to commit twofold whoredom against their lords, then it was that Christ fully displayed his greatness and kingly temper, when of his great wealth he redeemed both king and thrall at the same price, holding up them that fell and raising all that were bowed down, and teaching them many hymns of power.'

Thormod now said to Thorgeir: 'Is it not better to lodge with your kinsman's curs and lap up swill than to be plagued at night with this goblin and his squalling?'

'Thanks for those words,' said Thorgeir, who had got up fully armed. 'It was no small insult to give us houseroom with so vicious a fool that he rates good men's courage and thrall's malice alike.'

Thormod said they would be serving Thorgils right if they killed his priest.

'No,' said Thorgeir, 'then we should lose all claim on my kinsman Thorgils. The day is like to come when it will be better for us to have a refuge here. But we may well give the clerk a beating.'

With that they seized Jörund and loosened his clothes, but as the man was a feeble scarecrow and his hairshirt bristly,

they soon wearied of beating him in the middle of the night. And besides it was like being stung with nettles to lay about him.

Afterwards they went out under open sky. All was still and starry in the Westfjords.

★ 8 ★

As Yule came on, the comrades took to making the round of the Westfjords for bed and board, visiting themselves especially on men of substance who were feasting their friends. They always came uninvited. Thormod was the spokesman, and as of old it was thought some sport to listen to him. Not all were equally glad of their company. Nor were they easy to please. They took liberties and rattled weapons.

Thormod's father Bessi was not much for this circuit, and sent word that he would rather feed and house them at Laugabol than have them intrude on strangers. So they went home when Yule was over. For champions it was a joyless place. The valley lies far inland, and there is seldom a passer-by on winter days. The small farmers round about were thin-blooded, careless of sport and manly life. The comrades slept till late in the day, and when they woke it was mostly to rant of olden heroes, or redouble their vows to fear no foe and give way to no man, and never to bow the knee to an enemy, but to fight to the last gasp.

Each winter, as the sun began to climb higher, young men of the district were wont to meet and play games on the lake at the foot of Laugadale, near Laugabol, and so it was this year. The weather was mild, cold at night but sunny by day, and the ice firm. The young men engaged in different sports, wrestling, horse-fighting, ball-playing, and tug-of-war. Many

scdate fathers were there with their sons, helping the players to see that rules were kept. There were also young girls sitting at the edge or on the bank in the midday sun; some were finely coifed, and they had mothers, nursemaids or thrall-women looking after them. When there was a pause in the game; Thormod skald went over to these girls to greet and jest with them. There was one girl with fair eyes and sweeter hue than the others. She looked searchingly at their guest, rather hanging back, as though on purpose to see how things turned out before saying too much, and rather mocking, as though she were diverted by the wellgrown and courtcous athlete without putting much faith in him. Now there was a shout from the ice, for Thormod and another to join in the play.

As he was going, he turned back to this girl and asked whether he had seen right. Could this be his little neighbour from Ögur?

Yes, she said laughing. It had taken him long enough to know her from other folk.

Thormod took her hand, drew her out of the group of women, and held her in talk. She had her back to the crowd.

He said: 'You are the only woman I should wish to praise in a song.'

Now she stopped laughing, horror came into her eyes, and her cheeks coloured.

'Do me no such shame,' she answered quickly in a low voice, and her eyes were wet. 'My thrall Kolbak will kill you. He is sitting on the bank yonder, watching us as we talk. Besides, I hear tell that you had your arms full when you rhymed of Coalbrow.'

'I will make you a greater and better lay,' said he.

'I shall be shamed through the whole parish,' said she, and now her eyes were hot.

'Another time I will seek you out at home,' said he.

She replied: 'It is very bold of you to stand talking with me alone in public, for us to be shouted after.'

'Next time I will talk with you in private,' said he.

'I cannot rule your ways,' said she, 'but go only such as

will not tarnish you more than me, now that spring is coming and light nights. But I will be no man's doxy.'

'Nothing but sudden death shall keep me away from you.'

Then Thorgeir Havarsson called on him again to make haste. When Thormod Coalbrowsskald heard his oath-brother's voice, he at once left the girl.

At that time there were many out west in Isafjord Deep who were brisk at games, and they were ill pleased to find themselves getting the worst of it from interlopers like Thorgeir Havarsson; so they set on him with all their might. Nor did Thorgeir spare any. They grappled furiously on the ice, and some went down senseless under Thorgeir's fists. Some yeomen's sons cried out that they should all take to their weapons and pinch this fellow between shields. But honest, good-humoured folk stepped in, and contrived to stay the quarrel between Thorgeir and those local men who were ringleaders.

Vermund of Eyri had come to the meeting for his amusement; but when he thought that the young men's strength and spirit were getting out of bounds, he walked off and called on his kinsman Bessi to ride with him to the ship.

He said: 'It would be better for your son Thormod not to choose his cronies in other parishes, if he can find none but such as have ben turned out of the Westfjords for misrule, or have a doom of outlawry hanging over their heads for man-slaughter. I should be glad if you sent Thorgeir Havarsson packing, for he is as envious as his father and an ill companion for your son Thormod.'

When the games were over, Thormod went to where the women had sat, looking for the girl; but she was gone. He asked where he might find Thordis, Katla's daughter from Ögur.

They said the thrall Kolbak had brought up her horse, lifted her into the saddle and taken her home.

Thormod was roaming to and fro on the ice near the band of women, just as his comrade Thorgeir Havarsson went by.

'Whom are you seeking among these women?' asked Thorgeir.

'There was a woman here just now, but now she is gone,' said Thormod, 'and to me it is as though all sunlight had gone from the day.'

'Let us not be fooled by sun-dazzle', said Thorgeir.

'Of her I will sing,' said Thormod.

Thorgeir said: 'Unmanly the old skalds would have called it, to sing of coarse-shanked daughters of clowns and not see those women that glitter against the sky in swan-shape.

'It has come about,' said Thormod, 'that I am less fond than I was of women that fly through the air.'

'Nothing will you repent more,' said Thorgeir Havarsson. 'That man sits lowest who makes himself little for women.'

Then Thormod Coalbrowsskald looked up at his friend Thorgeir Havarsson with a smile.

'You need not bode me ill luck,' he said, 'for I shall praise your head at its worth, when the end draws near.

Now folk were making ready to return home from the games. Bessi Haldorsson approached the comrades, leading his horse by the bridle. He said to Thorgeir:

'You held your own at the games, Thorgeir. A fire-eater are you, and much fame awaits you. But we in Isafjord Deep support life by farming and fishing, not by matching ourselves with heroes in derring-do. We should therefore be glad if you would curb your manly feats in our midst. There is no knowing what will be the end of these times, if our sons are to be knocked senseless by outland folk when they meet for pastime. Now I will lend you this horse and my good cloak, so that tonight you may take the fell road home to the south. I would have you oblige me in this for the sake of the friendship between you and Thormod, and so as to prevent my getting illwill for your sakes. Besides, it was in the agreement between our kinsman Vermund and your father Havar that your family should keep to the south of the big fjords. And that came of events we need not bring up again.'

The two comrades did not think they had strength and means to go on swaggering in the Westfjords as they had done for some time, still less if the great men got their backs

up. Thorgeir took the horse and cloak and prepared to ride south. Thormod went with him.

‘What shall we do in the spring?’ asked Thormod Coal-browsskald. ‘Shall we hire ourselves out and trade our labour for fish and butter?’

Thorgeir answered: ‘There is a better way. If we are to be denied guest’s welcome at the farms, we will ride about and demand our necessities. But deeds are like to be few while we have no ship, and it comes back to me that my father had once a fishing-boat. To be sure it is now rotten and leaky ; but when it has been well caulked and tarred we will muster loose folk and go aviking here in the west. Our corner has many and narrow fjords, and between them fells sheer to the sea, lonely farms, scant of folk, and hard to rally against vikings. Here we can get ourselves merchandise like true men, levying from the farmers fish, train-oil, sheepskins, frieze-cloth and walrus tusks, and let those that can buy themselves free of trouble with gold and silver. Then when we have booty enough, we kill our crew, buy ourselves weapons and a share in a vessel, and sail to foreign lands.’

In the moonlight night they rode from Laugadale over the Neck of Thernuvik, led their horses over the Pike, for that is the steepest road in the Westfjords, and then rode on over the snow and ice of Kollafjordheath to Breidafjord. They had great things in hand, and grew more determined the more difficulties they saw. On the evening of the next day they came to Reykjahallor, where they were given a meal, but few cups of welcome. That night they slept, and next morning they called men together as witnesses of their oath, for now they meant to go under greensward. Since the earth was frozen deep down, too hard to cut a fresh strip of sward, they borrowed some frozen turves from a haystack and crawled under those, opened a vein, mixed their blood, and pronounced that they had now sworn brotherhood, and that they would stand together in everything from now on, and go halves in all they obtained like true men by force of arms, and that he who was granted longer life would spare no pains to avenge the other. Christian folk laughed at the mad-

ness of these two frozen-turves planning to go halves in the lice that crawled on them both, for it was likely to be some time, they said, before such a pair of tramps had anything else to go halves in.

Then the oath-brothers parted ; Thorgeir Havarsson went home to his mother to get himself a ship, and Thormod Coalbrowsskald set out for Isafjord Deep.

★ 9 ★

Of Thormod it is to be said, that he rode back the way he had come, across the highland, and lay that night in Isafjord. He slept still well on in the day, and then rode into Laugadale. Not a wind was stirring. But in the evening, when he had got most of the way home, he turned his horse loose and began to climb the fell without showing himself at home. There was a new moon. There is a tarn up on the fell, and it was frozen. He was so light of step that he rather flew than walked over the fell that night. He ran down into Ögurdale by a river that has its source in the tarn, and that is no common path.

At Ögur the door faced the water, for Isafjord Deep is highway and lifciver. Thormod came down the ravine to the back of the farm buildings, and groped about till he found a window looking towards the fell. It was not large, and was formed of eight membranes stitched together with sinew. He climbed up to the ledge, spoke the girl's name once or twice and tapped on the window. The girl started awake and asked fearfully who it was.

Thormod gave his name.

'What do you want?' asked she.

'I have made an ode on you,' he said. 'Let me in.'

'I am no king or jarl,' said she. 'Keep away from me with

your doggerel. I let no champions and brawlers into my house, nor yet skalds that pester women with love-rhymes.'

'No better song has been made,' said he.

She said: 'You cannot think I will do mother the shame of listening to your songs at the time of day when we women get most scandal by it. But it is what she has always said, that you are a great scamp.'

'Then open the window and see if it be true,' said he.

'Kolbak will wake up at your shouting and come and kill you,' said she.

'Your thrall troubles me less than your will,' said he. 'Will you rather hear my song through the window?'

'My shame will not be less if you wake mother and the servants too with your sauciness,' said she.

'Shall I stick my knife through the window?' he asked.

It was a black day when I first set eyes on you,' said she. 'Why did you not go with your witless friend Thorgeir?'

'Because I love you more than him,' said he.

She said: 'What have I done to have Thorgeir's fellow and Coalsow's jewel seeking me over the fell at night, to lie to me and make me cry?' Go your way for ever.'

'If you let me in, I will murmur it in your ear,' said he, 'and so my lay will not wake Kolbak or your mother or any here, but lull you to sleep.'

The girl replied: 'Never shall it be said that Thordis of Ögur keeps open window for guests at night, and you are not scanty crazed to ask me, simple little maid, for what only trulls grant.'

And with these words she pushed back the shutter Kolbak had made for her, and let the man into her room. On posts and chair-arms were carved the figures of gods, but they were only half-done, for Christianity came to Iceland before the master had finished his work. The new moon was shining on half-carved jaws of the cats Freyja drives over the sky. When the girl had loosened her window, she slipped her shoes off, jumped into bed again and shrank up in a corner. But when he was in, the song had to wait. First he had much else to

talk of. She said that she would hear nothing but the song, and this was a shocking cheat.

He said: 'Much seems to us skalds more needful, when we are sitting by women, than to repeat the verses we made on you when you were further off. We would rather lay a hand on your knee.'

'I am almost grown,' said she, 'yet this is beyond all I have heard for craziness, that men should lay hands on a woman's knee, and you are not scantily lewd to ask such a thing, but you shall have leave, if you will repeat your song the while.'

When he had begun on the song, he thought the knee moved knowingly, as though this were not the first time of a man's touching it.

'How is this?' asked he.

The little woman was long silent in the dark, and shed a few tears. But when he urged her, she said coldly:

'That I will never tell any.'

Then he grew sulky and flung away from her, and said no man should trust women. She dried her eyes with her arm and the back of her hand, and straightened up in the bed.

'Why do you not rather ask me what I think of the song?' said she.

'Tell me, if you think it is worth anything,' he replied.

'It has less to say of women who dazzle against the sky in swan-shape and choose a true fighting-man's fate, than of those night-hags that lay a halter on men and ride them, when day sees evening, and I am not a woman like that.'

Summer came while Thorgeir Havarsson was lingering in the south, and the oath-brothers' viking cruise made no headway. At the Aldething Thorgeir was prosecuted for his killing of the Skeljabreckka men. Thorgils Arason undertook his kinsman's defence, so he escaped banishment. It was pleaded in mitigation that father and son had lost their rights by killing Havar, but a full fine was to be paid for them, and Thorgils laid down the money.

As summer wore on, Thormod Bessason began to weary for his oath-brother. Laugadale seemed to him a tedious place for a man of heart and spirit, bent on renown. He was not given to doing anything, and heard of it on all sides. At that day there were none but worked for a living, except champions, who sat on remote skerries gnawing birds or crouched in ravines watching for packtrains of dried fish, or ladies so fine that they live in linen-chests.

Katla of Ögur was in the habit of overseeing the farm work in summer, and on dry days raking the hay with the other women, all the more since she had got rid of her Norse bailiff. Her daughter Thordis was indoors, skimming milk or spinning. On high summer days so still that the cat lay stretched out on the doorstep and the housefolk were in the meadow, Thormod Coalbrowsskald came to Thordis over the fell. He stayed long with her, but none heard what passed between them.

Then came a day when Thormod had been with Thordis, and had lingered so late that the haymakers were just returning from their day's work as he went out. At the door he ran into the mistress. Katla was a woman of presence. He bade her good evening. She made him a friendly return, asked how he

did, and bade him come in with her. He went. She asked him to be seated, and said :

‘Your visits here have now gone too far for me to see and say nothing. All know that you have beguiled Thordis. It is lucky for you that Thordis and I have no kin to stand by us, while you have a chief like your kinsman Vermund to back you up in your designs on widows and humble folk.’

He replied: ‘I meant no harm to you and Thordis, and indeed nothing is truer than that I hold her dear.’

Katla said: ‘Well, Thormod, it is open to you to take her in marriage. Here are broad fields, wide grasslands for hay, wood and meadow, fat cows and sheep and our mouse-grey cattle of merman breed. Here are down and eggs when spring comes, fish in river and sea, flounder-banks on the deep and seal in the autumn. Or else you may keep awake and harm her no more than you have already.’

Thormod replied: ‘I am poor in goods, and most would surely call the bargain unequal if I were to get such an excellent wife as Thordis when I have not yet killed with sword or fared on ship. It would become me better to follow a king into battle and deal death, before thinking of quiet.’

With that he went home to Laugabol.

It happened a few days later, as he was starting out for the fell, that his father Bessi called after him. Thormod turned back and went to his father in the infield. Bessi said :

‘When I was young, there was held to be little honour in trysting with girls by night—and half as much in broad day—it was thought no service to a young man’s renown thus to waste his manhood.’

‘I am old enough to rule my own steps,’ said Thormod.

‘I never heard from my parents that trysting was seemlier for young than old,’ said Bessi. ‘Men of worth take a wife, they do not court women. I and my kin will help you get a wife, if you choose. But neither I nor others will back you up against Katla’s footpads.’

Bessi went away when he had rebuked his son. Thormod sat on by the dike and thought things over. It seemed clear enough that he would do best for himself by giving way to

his father in this matter. He fretted that Thorgeir should be so slow, grieved at the heedlessness that attends lack of ships in the country, and at last went to sleep in the field.

But when he woke up, it was to find as others have done that men's purposes lose their force in sleep. Then, too, neither Bessi nor any other was near, and the sun stood in the north-west over Greenland; the cows lowed eleven times running, which means dry weather. Thormod took up his axe from the grass, and made for the fell.

When he reached Ögurdale it was getting dark. He waited for the approach of bedtime, and then came down the hill. When folk had gone to bed, he went to Thordis's loft-window, and she loosened the shutter, pushed it back and let him in. They whispered together in her chamber for a long time. But when night was almost gone, one could be heard riding out of the farm, and the cock crowed. Thormod jumped up at the clatter of hooves, and asked who was riding out at that time of day.

Thordis replied: 'It must be our thrall Kolbak, taking mother's woof to Heydal in Mjoafjord. They are skilled at weaving, and have set up her warp there.'

Presently the sun fell on Thordis's window. Thormod said it was time he went home.

She said: 'I would have you take another way home to Laugabol. You may go round the creek under the hill and not by the fell road. I have dreamed so much.'

He said he would take his usual road. He was not timorous, nor did he regard dreams.

'Will you take some hanks of blue yarn for me to Mjoafjord?' she asked.

'What will you do with frieze-cloth?' asked he.

'It is not out of the question,' said she, 'that I may have need of a scrap of frieze. It has been known for west-country women to get a rhyme or two, even though they sat astride in their breeches.'

As she pleased, said he.

Then she wound the hanks of yarn carefully about him inside his shirt.

In a dell under the steep rock-face, as day was breaking, there stood on an old nag under a worn saddle, with a horse-chair rope on its neck, listlessly gnawing the wet grass. Thormod could see no sign of the rider, but as he began clambering up the scree, suddenly small and great stones rolled down on him, with sparks and smoke and a smell of burning when they struck one another. Thormod saw that here was no common land-slip, and that he would be reproached as a coward if he turned aside. Therefore he went on up the slope. At the top of the scree stood a granite boulder, and from behind it a man's head stuck out. It was Kolbak. He had left off rolling stones and chosen the boulder as a breastwork. And there he stood levelling a spear. Thormod climbed up to the stone and struck off the shaft of the footpad's spear. Then he lifted his axe and brought it down on the thrall's shoulder; but the edge bit no more than whalebone. Kolbak replied by hewing with his axe at Thormod's chest, and it was like flogging a sack stuffed with wool. This wonder had happened in the fight, that iron bit on neither of them. Then Thormod threw away his axe and flung his arms round the man. They wrestled a while; both were young and lithe, so neither got the upper hand; but the thrall's smock was torn in the struggle, and showed the yarn underneath.

Then Thormod said laughing: 'Let us sit down and unravel our web.'

They stopped and sat down. Kolbak threw off his smock and pulled out twenty hanks of yarn. Thormod doffed his shirt and unwound another twenty.

'The same Norn must have spun us in,' said he.

Kolbak made no answer, but plucked up a dock-leaf from the scree and began chewing on it. His spear was lying a little way off in two pieces, and his trashy axe among the stones, while the yarn was scattered around them like brushwood.

Thormod said: 'You are a bold man to venture on me, unskilled as you are in weapons, and I have no heart to kill you, though it is in my power. For that you may thank the yarn lying here. Let us make peace. But first you shall say what there is between you and Thordis.'

Kolbak replied: 'I am a thrall. She is a woman.'

'Have you ever spoken such words to her as others may not hear?' asked Thormod.

Kolbak replied: 'Goodman Holmkel bought me in the Hebrides at ten winters. She was too little to make odds between free and thrall. We played together as children.'

'Have you been in her chamber since she grew up?' asked Thormod.

'The shutter that lets you in at fall of dark, I made for her.'

Thormod asked: 'Have you ever laid hand on Thordis's knee?'

'I do not ask you to spare me,' said Kolbak, and chewed his stalk.

• 'Do not forget that you are a thrall, and your life is in my hand,' said Thormod.

'Men are not my refuge,' said Kolbak. 'There is but one who will not only loose from chains, but raise from the dead.'

Thormod asked who that was.

'Josa mac Dé is his name,' said Kolbak. 'All that are bound shall embrace his coming, for into burning fire he casts all that tread their fellow-men under foot.'

'Is that fool you speak of akin to the craven son of a virgin who lives in Rome and has a gibbet for a throne?' asked Thormod.

'I am Irish,' said the thrall. 'It concerns me not where the place may be that you speak of, or who rules there. This I know, that Josa mac Dé has dukes enough to do battle for him, goodman Patrick and Columkill the priest, Columba the seaman and Kilian skald. His well-carved stone crosses rise up from my native hills in Ireland.'

'This is news,' said Thormod Coalbrowsskald, and fell into thought. 'Will you swear, Kolbak, by that Josa mac Dé, that you have never crept in yourself by the shutter you made Thordis?'

'Hew down her thrall, if you will,' said Kolbak, 'and I shall rise again as her king.'

Thormod Coalbrowsskald gazed long at the thrall, wondering at such talk. Then he got heavily to his feet. He was

wearv and said no more to the thrall, but started for home. His axe he left lying. The thrall sat where he was, chewing his stalk. At his feet lay their unbiting weapons and the blue yarn. When Thormod was out of sight, the thrall got up, gathered the web off the scree and took it on his back.

★ 11 ★

But when Thormod had been walking a little while he had trouble with his foot. It was rather numbness than pain. He felt queasy besides, and thought it strange that his foot was wet, as though he had stepped in warm bog-water. He sat down on the fell to see what ailed him. His shoe was full of blood, and it had clotted on his hose. The foot was still bleeding. He had been hurt in the ankle, not very slightly. One of the falling stones had ripped the flesh from the bone. He tore off a strip of his linen and bound up the foot, then crawled downhill and reached home with great loss of blood.

Thormod was kept long abed with this hurt, for the wound festered ; he did not get on his feet till summer was over, and was then lame. He had many misgivings about Thorgeir Havarsson and his absence. Either the champion must have gone abroad, or else he was dead. Things were looking ill for his own fame. No sooner could he stand up, than he began thinking of means to seek heart and comfort from his friend at Ögur, and thus change to love the famous deeds that were still undone. Nine weeks had gone by since his last visit to Thordis. The autumn brought stubborn weather, with persistent seawinds and blizzards. One stormy night he could no longer sit quiet at home ; when all were asleep he took his father's best horse and rode to Ögur. He came down behind the farm and whistled at the window of Thordis's

loft. She woke up in a fright and asked who was there in such weather.

‘Who do you think?’ he asked.

‘It might be so many,’ said she.

‘I am cold,’ said he. ‘Let me in.’

‘Why you more than the wind?’ said she, yet loosened her shutter in the storm, and he crept in. She fastened it again and lit the lamp on the doorpost, but without speaking to him. He asked what was weighing on her. She sat on the chair in her long shift, hid her face in her hands and cried bitterly.

‘Why must I see you again,’ said she, ‘when I have so berated the thrall for not killing you.’

He asked why her words to him were so cold.

‘And yet I left out the greatest shame you have done me, that you did not kill the thrall, and instead set the whole parish laughing at you, such a champion as you think yourself.’

‘You have small cause to wonder that I did not kill the thrall nor he me,’ said Thormod, ‘after wrapping us both in the same web. Nor was it from cowardice that I let him escape me, but because I would sooner go halves with you in the live thrall than leave you the whole body.’

She said: ‘I know that you do not love me, since you could spare him. I will free the thrall and make him your equal and your better.’

‘Do not cry so immoderately,’ said the skald. ‘One day, when the sun is shining on sea and land and mistress Katla sitting at home with all her folk, I will come riding to Ögur by the great gate.’

Thordis dried her eyes on a corner of her shift.

‘Riding alone?’ she whispered. ‘For then mother will set the dogs on you.’

‘That day I ride in good company,’ said he. ‘Father is with me, and Vermund of Vatnsfjord. They send word to your mother, and she bids us in and puts good ale on the table. Father and Vermund deliver their errand in proper form, and request her daughter for me in marriage. And Vermund offers on our behalf a great sum in land and moveables.’

'It is so less than a wonder, how you can lie,' said she. 'But they say it betokens love, that a man should lie to a woman rather than speak true. And a woman loves, if she believes him though she knows he is lying. It is good to hear you lying. Lie!'

'Our marriage contract will be completed with sober words and striking of hands,' said he.

Now the girl had almost quite dried her eyes.

'That sunshine day,' said she, 'when you ride in through the great gate with your father Bessi and Vermund of the company, and all the good things of Ögur are bestowed on me in dowry, will you love me then, Thormod?'

'That day no vain speech shall be heard,' said he.

'Will you at that time bring me a song,' asked she, 'that I know is for me and no other woman?'

'Men take wives that song may be needless,' said he. 'From that day neither you nor your mother shall be shamed.'

The girl had now taken comfort; she stood up and kissed him sweetly.

She said:

'I have heard women say it is better to be wed to a man than sung by him, and that may well be. From that time I will never plague you for songs.'

Storm-gusts smote with a heavy booming on fell and sea, and a cloud passed over the moon. In the midst of the storm a door opened; the blast shrieked through the house as though a whistle were blown, and from the entrance-hall could be heard shouts and cursing.

'There must be guests below,' said Thordis. 'Quick, out of the window!'

So saying she jumped into bed and pulled the clothes over her head.

He said: 'I stay here and run from no man.'

Clash of arms and men's voices rose from below, mixed with the baying of the storm-hounds. An affrighted farm-hand was being summoned to tell where the housewife's daughter had her bed. On the loft-ladder there was a sound of steps in hard-frozen shoes.

The guest who entered the maiden's chamber showed more like a sea-monster than a man ; he was iced over with snow and sea-spray, and the house creaked under his hoofs. His spear was ice-knotted to the blade. Thormod stood by the window with his axe raised. But when the guest pulled back his stiffened hood, and the light fell on his weatherbeaten mouth and smooth lad's chin, Thormod skald dropped the axe, sprang towards the guest and embraced him.

And when the girl perceived what was happening, she tore the curtains from the bed, stuck her long legs out of the bed-clothes, and smoothed down her shift as she got up. She was bare to the nipples. Her hair was streaming over her shoulders. Her eyes flamed, as she spoke these words:

'Man of death!'

One who is to be hanged and is waiting for the bough to spring up has no eye for life in bloom, in his sight it is all vanity. And Thorgeir Havarsson likewise gave no sign that he had observed the woman in whose chamber he was standing, but said to her paramour:

'Now I am come for you with a ship, Thormod.'

'So many a summer day have I looked for you,' said Thormod, 'that it is hard to see why we are to sail in vile weather in winter-tide ; but I will not fail word and oath to you. Say what you would have, and the skald follows the hero as of old.'

Thorgeir said: 'Many a dark night while others slept have I risen from my bed, heaved up my weapons, and bit the shield-rim in uncontrollable thirst for the praise that is won by killing men and ruling the World, or falling with glory. And here is at last a ship. I myself have put it so far to rights, being without money for craftsman's wages. I have enrolled loose folk to win fame in our company. Now I would have us sail to the Jökulfjords and along Hornstrands, killing all who say they are not afraid of us, and when that is done we can fare about the north at our will. I have heard tell that there is in those parts a mighty champion named Butraldi Brusason, giving out that he fears no man and will not stay till he has felled every blusterer and braggart in

the Westfjords. I take it for sure that such a champion will be no small threat to us, while he is alive. My counsel is that we should sail out against him this night, rouse his enmity and fight with him to the end, and take no rest till our victory is accomplished, so that all the World may see what we are.'

Thordis spoke up: 'Only a fool would set sail by night in villainous weather, to hunt outlawed thieves in the north, smash his boat to pieces and be eaten by fish, instead of enjoying the bliss set before him.'

Thormod fastened his trousers and said:

'Men become skalds and heroes by not enjoying the bliss set before them. Never will the saga of us oath-brothers be lived, if I dawdle this night at your side.'

• Then the girl went up to Thorgeir Havarsson and gave the champion a box on the ear.

'Troll take you!' said she. 'Your praise will be greatest the day you are torn by dogs and ravens.'

Thorgeir laughed a little, but without seeing the woman.

Thormod said to the woman at last: 'For love I sought you across the fell, but joyful as I have been many a night in your arms, I love you most the night I am leaving you.'

★ 12 ★

Thormod put no more questions, but followed his oath-brother Thorgeir to the ship. By then the snowstorm had passed, but a bank of black cloud loomed threateningly to seaward; the sea was heavy, the moon shone on rime-clothed islets and rocks.

Down at the landing-place lay a ship. It was not large, and was flung to and fro in the breakers, for there was not much ballast. There stood sea-beaten men with frosted beards and

eyebrows, chipping ice from yards and ropes. Thorgeir said of the crew that among them were a father and son, who came from Kjalarnes, but had no settled home and hired themselves to the peasants for their keep. Then there was a thief from the south, whose life was forfeit and who was named Tjörvi. Thorgeir's fourth seaman was Oddi, also called Louse-Oddi; he was weak in the head, had been most of his life a charge on a poor mother at Akranes, and had begun going from door to door, when Thorgeir hired him.

Thorgeir spoke thus to his men:

'Here stands my oath-brother, Thormod Bessason, and he has a half-share with me in all on board. He is a greater skald than any now living in the Westfjords. You are to heed his yea and nay as though they were mine, for we stand together in everything. First now drink your fill of that oil-keg, and then we sail west about Rytagnup and keep to sea till we have reached Adalvik. From there I have heard tales of Butraldi Brusason, who has a name as the greatest champion in the Westfjords, and of his arrogance. We will sail against him and kill him.'

The crew thought Thorgeir had spoken manfully, and approved his words.

Thorgeir took the helm as soon as they had pushed off. Thormod was at the sheets and set the tub running close-hauled under full sail. As they rushed along, the vessel played ducks and drakes, heeled over and shipped water to leeward, while all on board plied the scoops as best they could.

They had not sailed long when they ran into a black snow-storm with hard gusts and drenching waves; the sea hung over the ship like drizzle. Thormod reefed the sail and let the ship drive. It was dark as pitch, and they lost all mastery in the raging of the storm. Timbers and ropes creaked, the boat filled again and again, and most that was loose went overboard. Only the scoops in the shipmen's fists kept up the talk, and none could tell whether their craft would be smashed, or go to the bottom.

When the sky cleared again to show a chip of the moon,

they were off Geirsfell in Snæfellsstrand. Above their heads glimmered a sea-lashed cliff with a giant beard of ice.

They tried to stand out from the coast, where their vessel might smash against the rocks, beat out to sea and work their way past Rytagnup. But scarcely had they won free of the last rocks of Snæfellsstrand when the sky again turned black and a fresh tempest was howling; this blizzard was more persevering than the first. Then the rudder snapped, and they had long been driving rudderless through the night when the seas fell off and grew choppy. When at last it cleared, snow-laden fell-brows were towering up on both sides.

Thorgeir asked Thormod if he knew anything of these fells.

Thormod said: 'I do not think we should be worse off if we were to drive a while longer on the same course. Yet it was far from my thought, that I should see these fells tonight.'

Presently it cleared up enough for them to see the Byre-women¹ towards noon. They had now entered a narrow fjord; the foreshore was scant, and at the far end rose inaccessible mountains, lowering with horrid crags, blue and naked, and at their foot sandy fords. A river ran into the sea. Their nostrils drew in a reek of cowbyres and smoke from dwelling-houses. They hauled their craft up the beach on rollers. Of their effects none remained but the oil-keg, which was lashed astern, and the weapons they had in a rope round their waists.

Thorgeir asked if his oath-brother still thought he knew where they had got to.

'I must be further out than I think,' said Thormod, 'if that steep fell yonder is any other than Giantess Crag, where there are prints of troll women's feet in the rock, and if we are not now in Ravensfjord, the innermost of the Jökulfjords. This place has often visited me in dreams.'

'Then we are a foul way off our course,' said Thorgeir, 'if we must needs land here; but it looks to me as though our folk had no great zest for more sailing just now, and besides the mast is broken, the sail gone and the rudder in pieces.'

¹ Orion.

They were all sore spent after the voyage, their garments frozen like boards. The lad from Kjalarnes could not walk, his father had frost-bite, and both had to be given a lift. A faint light showed in the sky, but it was long till sunrise. A little lower down they came on a farmstead. No one was yet stirring. Thorgeir asked his oath-brother to go to a window and rouse the household.

Thormod replied: 'You are our leader, you shall rouse them and wish them the god's peace. But if you have no luck, you shall call on me.'

Thorgeir went up and shouted through a window that there were guests outside, and they were to open the door.

A woman asked who was abroad.

'Champions and slayers,' said Thorgeir.

'Are you not peaceable folk, then?' asked the woman.

'I hope it will be long till any man can charge us with making peace,' said Thorgeir. 'We give way to none.'

'Then what do you ask of us?' said the woman.

'We ask nothing of any,' said Thorgeir. 'But we will have food to eat and fire to thaw our clothes and a place to sleep. And if you deny us these, let a proper man of your household, or more than one, come out and do battle with us.'

The woman replied: 'It has never been the way in these fjords that spent folk had to fight the peasants for shelter. You must be a stupid man. What is your name?'

'Here is Thorgeir Havarsson with his company,' said he 'and we challenge all in the Jökulfjords that are worth anything to come and fight us.'

Then said Thormod Coalbrowsskald, 'Now it is my turn, oath-brother.'

He went to the window, and after old custom bade gods and men peace in the house.

'Who is it?' said the woman.

'Here stands Thormod Coalbrowsskald,' said the guest, 'and I know for truth that there are women here in the Jökulfjords that have heard his name.'

When he had spoken these words the door opened, and there stood a woman; she had thrown a blue cloak round

her, she had large eyes and black brows, and there came from her more warmth than from other women. She opened her arms to Thormod skald, kissed him tenderly, and made him welcome here with his following, for as long or short a time as he would. She had all but lost hope of this hour, said she, and now they should carry in such as were frost-bitten or helpless, and wake to life such as were near death. They had come to Coalbrow's dwelling in Ravensfjord. The thrall Shaghair went out to feed the stock, without greeting the guests.

'Now it is plain, brother, why you must needs creep into the fjords,' said Thorgeir, 'when we should have left every ness behind us out on the deep. The last thing in my mind, when we sailed out from Borgarfjord, was to steer for women's knees in the west country.'

'Your saga would now be done, brother,' said Thormod, 'if I had not lied about the course, when our need was sorest.'

Thorgeir said: 'We rule the farm while we tarry here, and ask nothing of women.'

'That is good news,' said Coalbrow. 'Too long have my daughter and I led widowed lives, mocked at by most. Lucky that we now have guests with manhood in them, both to rejoice us and to avenge the griefs we have had to endure from wicked men.'

The oath-brothers now entered the house, dragging in those that were disabled. A fire was made for them in the hall; they were brought dry clothes, and the wet were hung up to dry. Kettles were fetched out, the housefolk boiled mutton and heated porridge, and the fainting men came to themselves and began to dry the weapons they had bound round them, and scour them of rust and sea-salt. Then the women lit them to bed.

It was late in the day when Thorgeir woke up. Outside was hard weather, frost and blizzard. Thorgeir woke his men and said he had not enrolled them to lie their length up in the fjords. He had seemlier work for them elsewhere. The mistress said that it was foul weather, and useless to venture

out; her guests would be dearer to her, the more they gave themselves up to rest.

Thorgeir said they were not seasick, and made little odds of what was called good or bad weather.

'Neither frost nor storm can hurt us, for we have no wife, children or beasts to feed.'

But since their vessel was much knocked about and little sea-worthy, and besides deep under snow, and the inner fjord ice-bound, nothing came of putting to sea. Thorgeir said that if the ice deferred their cruise beyond bearing he would take the fell road to Hornstrands with his men. She asked what he had to do there.

Thorgeir said: 'Butraldi is the name of a man, a great champion. He has let fall that he will give way to none. This man roams about Hornstrands, and I have made a vow to kill whosoever thinks himself as brisk as I.'

She asked what was to happen then.

Thorgeir said that when all champions and other folk of any excellence in the north were dead, he and his oath-brother would be free to take whales and other great fish at Hornstrands.

Then Coalbrow laughed and said: 'You are strange men to be bent on chasing hapless outlaws at Hornstrands and flensing whales, when there is manlier work nearer hand.'

They asked what that was.

'It seems to me a manlier deed,' said the housewife, 'to kill free men in townlands, when they oppress widows and other poor folk, than to round up tramps and skin whales.'

They asked whom she meant.

Coalbrow replied: 'Across the fjord at Svidinstead live good-man Ingolf and his son Thorbrand. They have built a house on a ledge of Lonanup. They feed their cows and sheep on my land, though they have a patch of bog on the fell above. And they pull skate, halibut and plaice out of the water within a line's-cast of my infield.'

Thorgeir said: 'We count it no mortal offence in a man that he gets a living, if only he is meaner than we and like to fear us.'

The mistress said: 'I have left untold the thing it is worst for us women to endure of men, from which we are not shaped to defend ourselves. And I am now speaking to you, Thor-mod, who made a noble song on me than other women in the Westfjords have to boast of, so lovely a work that it would long since have cost you your life, if I had kinsman or friend to protect my honour.

'So it is, that Ingolf of Svidinstead showed his flesh in bed with me last Yule, when he and his son found my daughter and me in tears over our unhappy state and the ale that had run out, leaving us no drop of cheer. And he has continued since and will not leave off. Thorbrand Ingolfsson climbed up to my daughter. Both of us are long surfeited with enduring such foul vexation and ignominy.'

As she spoke these words, the thrall Shaghair laughed in the doorway.

She said to him: 'It will be long till I have such a hot love for a craven like you that I put weapons in any hand to kill you. Out of free men's sight!'

Thorgeir looked to see if his oath-brother could tell what was fit and right in this matter.

Thormod said: 'We should not long allow so honest a woman to be oppressed by bad men. She has not deserved that we should refuse her, or make the least pause in doing as she asks. Now it is time to show this woman our manhood in other things than rhyming.'

'Get up, lads, and pay the housewife for shelter,' said Thorgeir Havarsson.

They got up, took their weapons and went out.

They came to Svidinstead late in the evening, when all were abed. The farm hung on a ledge low down the fell, and dropping sheer to the sea. Round the buildings was a low dike. Beneath the fell-brow water oozed out in runnels, and it was now stiff and thick with ice. Thormod went to a window and bade peace in the house. Who was there, asked those within, and what was their errand?'

Thorgier Havarsson spoke up thus:

'Here are come the oath-brothers Thorgeir Havarsson and Thormod Bessason. Our errand is to challenge you to fight with us, for we have heard you are brisk men. Now we will kill you, and when you are dead we will loose your cattle and take them away. And your horses we will load with such moveables as are to be found. It remains to defend yourselves well with manly heart, while there is life in you.'

Those within asked if they could expect mercy and peace from the two champions.

Thorgeir said no.

'We are assured that you have love-commerce with certain women in the neighbourhood and turn beasts into their pasture without leave or honest meaning. They will no longer endure such injury.'

Goodman Ingolf replied that neither he nor his son begged for their lives. And indeed life was little worth that came as a gift from evil-doers. He said they were ready to die with arms in hand, if it were the Norns' will, and thus fall for their two barren cows and the pile of skate working in their muck-heap against the winter, for that was the tale of their possessions. Of women and love he said, that one might as well trust a sick calf or a coiled snake, as the High Song has

it. Women are most loving when they have a man's ruin and death in view.

Father and son now got their clothes on, took their spears and came to the door. They had two labourers, one a thrall, the other worn out with age. These came crawling out through the ash-hole; the old man had a stick in his hand and laid it about Thorgeir's men, but the thrall made off uphill and refused to fight. When Ingolf and Thorbrand tried to get out, Thorgeir and Thornod blocked the door and jabbed with their weapons through the opening. Then they went mad with rage and hewed away through the door with all their might, till they felt warm blood splashing in their faces. Soon father and son had sunk down by the wall. And there was heard the whistling that comes of a wound in the chest. The oath-brothers let their swords dance on them, till neither groan nor cough could be heard.

They now called their men, and said that Ingolf and Thorbrand were dead and the others should have quarter. The old man had then sunk to the ground, and the thrall was high up the fellside. The moon had risen. The oath-brothers pulled the bodies out of the door, two bloody lumps of raw meat. They laid them on the doorstep and dedicated them to Odin in the ancient manner. They gave the bodies their due, laid the old man at a proper distance from his master and left him unhallowed to the gods; but they were no sooner gone than the old man was up again and had found his stick, for he was living enough. And just as the old man got up, the thrall came back from the fell.

Ingolf and Thorbrand had had two winter-old calves in the byre, and an ancient nag, skin and bone. The sheep were abroad, for the soil of Svidinstead was too poor to yield fodder of any worth. All they owned besides was their winter provision of skate in the muck-heap. Thorgeir said they ought to load the fish on the nag, but Thornod expressed his doubts of that. It was wretched booty for so excellent a woman as Coalbrow, said he, and the end of it was that they left the calves, jade and stinking fish and went off with nothing but the renown.

Coalbrow and her daughter Geirrid were standing at the door, when the two champions came from Svidinstead. They declared themselves confident of good news, kissed them and led them in. Thormod and Thorgeir at once related what had come of their journey. The dwelling-house at Ravensfjord was none so small, and there were fish-sheds and the like from a time before the fjord had been settled. Coalbrow and her daughter had adorned the wall with hangings, especially where it was near giving way. On the floor burned thick logs of driftwood. Mother and daughter washed the blood from the hands and faces of their guests, and cleaned their weapons and clothes. They asked many questions about the combat, and the deeds of the Svidinstead men before they fell. It seemed to them laughable that such bold and amorous folk could not win out, but had been killed in their lair like foxes. Many dainties were set before the oath-brothers to rejoice and reward them for the work: singed sheep's-head, black pudding and broth, sour shoulder of mutton and ram's testicles and at last mulled ale. Coalbrow waited on Thormod and Geirrid on Thorgeir.

The oath-brothers asked what Coalbrow and her daughter meant to do, and who would take up the feud for Ingolf and Thorbrand. They said those two had been the last of any excellence in the in-fjords, and that others would be in no hurry to try a fall with the champions. Coalbrow said that when the time served she would go to her old friend Vermund at Vatnfjord and make good the loss of father and son, who had been of his following, if he chose to take payment, for they were kinless men. The oath-brothers asked where she had her wealth.

She said: 'I think I still have the wherewithal to make up to Vermund the loss of his men, whom I have let slay for ill-usage of us. And while you are in my house none will offer to disturb you, thanks to your manly hearts and partly to my friendship with Vermund.'

Thorgeir Havarsson jumped up from his seat and said: 'I did not thrust bark from shore down in Borgarfjord to have a woman's shift as my shield and bulwark. Where is Ver-

mund's kinsman Butraldi at this time, and how is he armed?'

'It is something new in these parts for Butraldi Brusason to keep men awake at night,' said Coalbrow, laughing. 'Fill the champion's horn, Geirrid.'

Thorgeir Havarsson was short-legged and somewhat bandy like most of his countrymen ; his eyes were blue and his face ruddy, his hair ash-blond, his teeth broad and white with thick red gums. He met folk with his mouth drawn down, and sat glowering in joyous company. It was only when he had killing or other great deeds in mind that he smiled. And though maiden Geirrid sat at his feet with her arm round his knee, and the horn was full, his thoughts were far from the revel, for he longed to know whether the World could provide a champion that was his equal or more.

'Why do you sit silent, Thorgeir? Am I not comely?' asked Geirrid. 'Most menfolk are on the watch to give me a squeeze when I hand them drink. Or do you not see how the skald is carolling to mother and blowing his voice up manfully in her praise, old as she is? How much more should you disport yourself with me, that am younger. Put your head in my lap and I will hunt the lice, and tell me the while how you killed my lover Thorbrand, and whether he shrieked as he felt the steel.'

Thorgeir said: 'You shall not hunt my lice for that. He and his father went to their death like men.'

'Did you not hear Thorbrand utter a last word to me in death, when your spear stood in his belly?' asked the girl, gliding up into Thorgeir's lap and clasping him round the neck.

'We remember them both as men of stout heart, brisk in defence of their own, though it were small and poor, and in their last hour unstintedly reviling the women that had betrayed them,' said Thorgeir.

'I know not how stout a heart Thorbrand had, nor does it concern me,' said the girl, 'but I know he was cleverer than you at laying his head in a woman's lap. It seems you are better able to fall on sackless men in the night and murder them than to profit women. You are an ill exchange.'

Then Thorgeir got up, so that the girl slid down between his legs. He straddled over her and said:

‘Thorgeir Havarsson will not be praised in song while the ages roll for having pawed girls better than other men. Thormod and I have been foully duped by mother and daughter into killing their lovers, that we might tread in their steps. Now the old saying is proved, that women are always worst to those they love most. My counsel is that tonight we take the fell-road to Hornstrand, there to busy ourselves with more needful work.’

‘Are we to break so splendid a feast,’ said Thormod, ‘without doing our duty by such excellent widows?’

Thorgeir said: ‘The fault is not mine if you choose a peace deadlier than any war, love-peace in women’s arms. Nor will it recoil on any head but your own.’

Thorgeir put on his coat, girded himself up, bade Louse-Oddi come with him and left the house.

Geirrid stood looking on, till the door clapped to at the hero’s heels. And when she saw that, the blood rushed to her face.

‘Thormod,’ said she, ‘run after him and kill him, if you are not craven.’

He replied: ‘Though my affection to my oath-brother Thorgeir may be changeable, yet I have no thought of such an exploit as you urge. Now I would enjoy peace and love in your house for a time. Let us be merry!’

★ 14 ★

It was freezing hard, and the snow blowing into drifts, but there was a clear sky with northern lights. That night Thorgeir Havarsson turned his back on Ravensfjord, and took the road over Skorarhcath to Hornstrands. It was toilsome walking, and Louse-Oddi would always tread on the bare patches, but Thorgeir Havarsson said it was a petty fashion to turn aside for a little snow. It became brisk men to follow their noses, whether there were snowdrifts ahead of them or bare ground. And when Louse-Oddi began to find the paths somewhat steep, Thorgeir asked if he had never heard where Thor drove his he-goats.

They came to Hornstrands as folk were stirring, and reached a house where men were already abroad feeding the stock. Thorgeir asked where the champion Butraldi could be found. They said he would shortly be on his way to his kinsman Vermund in Isafjord Deep, as was his custom when winter set in up north.

‘What should he do there?’ asked Thorgeir.

They said that when winter came to Hornstrands, thieves and outlaws had little opportunity to steal milk from cows at pasture or sleep in byres.

‘Where will Butraldi have hidden his treasure and other war booty?’ asked Thorgeir.

They knew of no treasure he had but Vermund’s leave to roam about Hornstrands in summer, to the great annoyance of most in those parts, and slave at the winter fishing in Arnarfjord.

Thorgeir said: ‘I have never heard that Butraldi Brusason catches fish. You are full of lies here at Hornstrands.’

They roared with laughter and answered:

'It may be that there are folk living in other parishes who know better, but it is like to take stouter men than we have at Hornstrands to put down Butraldi Brusason.'

Thorgeir asked what they found so laughable. 'What weapons has Butraldi?'

They said sure enough he had one weapon that made men give up what he asked for ; but it was not a weapon Thorgeir need worry about when they met.

Thorgeir bade them have food and sleep ready, then went on his way to find Butraldi. He and Louse-Oddi had to cross steep moors and scaurs, or shoal-water under beetling cliffs, for here the land rises steeper from the sea than elsewhere in the circle of Earth. And whenever they came to human dwellings they would ask after Butraldi.

At evening they reached a little farm under a fell ; three travellers were at the door, talking to the goodman and demanding shelter. It was Butraldi Brusason and with him two ruffians. Butraldi was knitting his brows horribly at the goodman and swaggering at him. He said the fatted calf must be killed to make them a feast, and the women must be at their service, if there were any. The goodman was a petty soul and stricken in years. He said that they had not provision enough for a fitting welcome to such great men, that there were no calves and the womenfolk were shrivelled with age.

'Would you rather have me piss in your well?' said Butraldi.

He had just spoken these words when Thorgeir Havarsson walked up with Louse-Oddi. Thorgeir halted in the farm-yard, laid the axe over his shoulder with the edge uppermost, as champions do, and said:

'Here comes Thorgeir Havarsson. Good it is that we meet at last, Butraldi. I am come to bid you battle and kill you.'

Butraldi Brusason was undersized and very bandy, no longer young, with tufts of grey beard, shallow fish-eyes, broad jaws and loose lips. His weapon was an old spear, as rust-eaten as though it had been dug out of the earth. His fellows had only staves shod with iron. Butraldi wore a lamb-skin pelt over his shoulders, and his followers had threadbare

frieze jerkins. All had their feet swathed in rags and scraps of hide. Thorgeir, it is said, had looked for a rude answer to his sharp greeting, yet not for what befell and must now be told.

When Butraldi Brusason perceived that there were now more guests in the farmyard, and that the last comers were bent on battle with the first, his heart was not seized with mouse-like trembling at the words addressed to him ; he left off his gobbling at the goodman, and in the dusk pushed a pug snout with large nostrils into Thorgeir's face, snuffed at the guest with his nose wrinkling, set his jaws agape like a rutting ram grinning at ewes, then let out a shrill lascivious bray, as when a stallion is noisiest among mares at stud ; whereupon followed a fearsome laugh, with monstrous snorts and grimaces, so that none had seen the like. It cannot be said that Thorgeir Havarsson was unshaken, to hear such ghastly sounds coming from a human being. Butraldi's vagabonds stood at a convenient distance in the snow, propping chin on staff. But Louse-Oddi would take no risks when he heard the noise, but made off round the corner and hid himself.

The goodman was so rejoiced at Thorgeir's coming that he ventured within his weapons and embraced him. This must be the protection of Odin, who on one and the same evening had sent him, useless old gaffer, not one but two heroes and champions to gladden him ; so he bade them come indoors, in the trust that their natural condescension would outweigh his poverty.

'But,' said he, 'one thing I would ask of your good worships in return, do no heroic deeds on my house, nor other exploits that preserve men's fame while the World stands, for I am chicken-hearted and so are my womenfolk. We cannot abide to see human blood.'

Now the champions with their men entered and sat down in the dwelling-house. Lights were lit for them, for the day was done. Thorgeir Havarsson sat at the far end of the bench with his axe on his shoulder. It was cold in the house, and Butraldi and his men tried to keep themselves warm by pull-

ing fingers. Then, since no fire had been made on the floor, Butraldi started to play leapfrog with them, tumble heels over head and crawl through himself; but now and then he went up to Thorgeir, fingering his clothes and squealing. The crones brought in two dishes; the champions were to eat of one and all their followers of the other. On the champions' dish lay a piece of cheese not very tractable to the teeth, and a rib of horse. The goodman stood in the doorway and bade his guests help themselves. It was ancient custom for men to trace Thor's mark over their food, or sign it with the cross of Christ, if they thought him the more powerful. Butraldi made short work of his crossing; he immediately seized the rib in both hands and gnawed it to the bone. Thorgeir had to content himself with the cheese. This is established by old books. But when they had eaten, Thorgeir wrapped his long cloak about him and leaned back in the corner with his axe. The goodman brought them sheepskins to lie in, and would then have put out the lamp. Thorgeir said there was to be a light burning all night. Butraldi took his skin and made himself a bed near Thorgeir's place up on the platform; he lay down across it with his head hanging over the edge, so that it might easily have been chopped off at a blow. Thorgeir thought it strange of Butraldi to show no fear of him; the champion fell asleep at once with a prodigious snoring, as though the Midgard serpent were loose. Thorgeir felt uneasy about the man and kept awake.

But towards midnight Butraldi woke up and began to shake himself and to claw and scratch himself with mighty yawns. He said:

'There is a cow bellowing through the wall, making me fear the dark. It must be an ill cow.'

Thorgeir said nothing.

'Shall we pass the time with play?' said Butraldi. 'Night at Hornstrands is long and tedious. I propose that we go flea-hunting. I think the sport will be greatest if we bet on who can kill the most fleas in my sheepskin between two cow-bellows.'

With that Butraldi spread his sheepskin between them,

took a bright silver coin from his pouch and put it up on a shelf.

'Here is good English silver,' said he, 'and the coin weighs half a mark. What will you stake against it?'

Thorgeir had settled with himself that he would hold no other debate with this man than words of truth from point and edge, therefore he said nothing; none the less he stared at the coin Butraldi took out, for Thorgeir Havarsson had never before set eyes on coined silver. Now Butraldi crawled over the skin on hands and knees and began playing himself, but since the light in the house was dim, and the small fry clever at getting away, there was no great massacre. Still he had felled two or three, when the cow bellowed.

'How many have you?' asked Butraldi.

But since Thorgeir had not joined in, Butraldi took his silver coin from the shelf and put it away again. He had won this, he said, yelling with laughter. Then he brought out another coin twice as big, and staked that. Thorgeir Havarsson stared curiously at the coin. After a good while came the next bellow, and Butraldi raked in his coin with immense howls of laughter and horrid din. A third time he made his stake. He took a gold ring out of his pouch and laid it on the shelf. But whether it were that Thorgeir found the man and his sport more tedious the more fleas he killed, or that the cow had become wholly silent, he could not resist sleep, and no more shall be told of that night.

Next morning Thorgeir Havarsson opened his eyes and saw that he was alone in the house, and that the axe had fallen out of his hands and down between his feet as he slept. Along with the others Louse-Oddi was gone. It was milking-time at Hornstrands, and Thorgeir called the goodman out of the byre and asked where his night-guests were. The goodman said they had left before the daystar showed in the east. Thorgeir said he was thirsty, and would have a drink of milk and then go after Butraldi and the others.

'They have taken Louse-Oddi with them,' said he.

The goodman said: 'Of Butraldi I have to tell, that for this morning he and his mates have drunk my cow dry.'

Thorgeir then asked for a jug of water.

'There we are ill off,' said the goodman, 'for they pissed in my well by way of thanks for shelter, so we cannot drink the water. And I call it shocking crazineess that a tramp such as Louse-Oddi should look to be more thriving under Butraldi, and desert so great a champion as Thorgeir Havarsson for a cow-sucker and well-pisser.'

★ 15 ★

It was late at night when Coalbrow lighted the skald Thormod to bed. He tried to lay hold of her knee. She said:

'I have heard that in Isafjord Deep there lies a young chit in a loft-chamber, and that you have married the song you made of me in youth to her praise. It does not become a snip of a girl to give ear to a song that was made of a ripe woman, or think she can take to herself the property of a worthy widow. And you may be sure of this, Thormod, that I will never lift this cloak high enough for you to reach the knee, unless you swear that no other woman is in your thoughts; but first you shall change back the song you made of me, and let me hear it this very night with the proper words.'

Thormod said she had a just claim on him in this matter. It was little labour to change a song, he said, and began at once to recite the lay of Coalbrow as it had been at first. And the mistress liked that better.

So that night came to an end, and the next day, and the skald was cherished at Ravensfjord. He might please himself whether to lie abed and have his meals brought there or to come in and warm himself by the fire. But on the second day after nightfall, when he had dropped asleep in his bed,

Coalbrow threw a cloak round her and went to the guest-house. She opened the guest's alcove without a sound, took him by the leg and woke him.

She said: 'I am so late in coming to serve my guest in bed, because my daughter keeps watch on me. She is inconsolable at the loss of her sweetheart Thorbrand, and his slayer's flight to the Strands. But now, late though it be, I will mend your clothes and brush your coat.'

But when she had seen to his clothes, she sat a while on the edge of the bed, and her knee was cold. He tried to lay hand on it and warm her. She bade him not delude himself, and cried bitterly.

He asked why she was not wholly joyous.

'I have,' said she, 'heard such tidings of you that I shall be slow to find comfort.'

He asked what those were.

'I have heard,' said Coalbrow, 'that when the little wench in the loft-room at Ögur thought my song had been fully converted to her praise, she desired you to make one all for her, in which you praised her above all others, but especially for being more knowledgeable in bed than other west-country women.'

He said: 'I did not know there had been gossip about the rhymes I made of that woman, if there were any.'

'Her sweetheart Kolbak thrall picked them up and taught them to his friends,' said the mistress, 'and now they are making sport for fishers, thralls, trampwomen and other west-country rabble, who need some mawkish discourse to pass the time when it is not fishing weather.'

He said it was simple courtesy for a man alone with a woman to offer her a love-rhyme, especially when she asked, but folly and whoredom in the woman to let others hear such a song.

'I did not expect of Thordis,' said he, 'that she would keep a sweetheart to mock me.'

The mistress said: 'You menfolk think you have a free hand with us women, especially when you have grown out of our keeping. You know that oftenest women's knees are

cold, but you will find, Thormod, that it is hard for you to come near me, unless you have something to offer in exchange.'

He asked what she would have. She replied:

'Now you shall convert the song you made for the hussy at Ögur to my praise and delight my ear with it. And you may have your hand on my knee as you recite.'

So they made that bargain. Thormod converted his song for Thordis to the mistress's praise, no more befell that night or next day, and Thormod and his companions lived well in Ravensfjord.

But towards midnight of the third night, when most in the Jökulfjords were abed, mistress Coalbrow came to the skald's bedside unawares. She had her cloak about her, for it was freezing hard. Her face was sorrowful. He asked what was her grief, and whether her knee was as cold as last time.

She replied: 'Doubtless your hand is warm, Thormod, yet it remains in doubt how clever you are at warming my knee. One thing is sure: on the very day you came here, my first request of you was to go and kill my sweetheart, and I sent you to him without first wrapping yarn round him. I have heard that Thordis Katlasdaughter of Isafjord Deep wound her sweetheart in hanks of yarn, before appointing you time and place to kill him.'

Thormod asked whether the mistress had thought out another trial or proof of his sincere love for her.

She replied: 'You have yet to make a song of me so outspoken that it cannot be marred to another woman's praise.'

He said he could not conceive how to make a song for one woman that might not be turned at his choice to fit other women.

She said: 'I demand no praise of the bright stars behind my eyelids, or of my hair's glory or my bewitching hue, or any of those parts for which most other women are praised when they rejoice a man. I well know that my eyes are not bright, and though I were raven-black aforetime, the hour is at hand for me to sit among grey beldams; the colours of my youth

are gone, and instead of a shape that skalds liken to the aspen and other slim trees, you have found a somewhat ample woman. And therefore it is scorn and not praise, whenever you turn songs about other women to my account. I will no longer put up with such rhyming. You are a grotesque skald.'

He said: 'It is not skald's work to remake the World as it shows from a crone's bed. Let each be hero first and skald second, and let noble heart rule the song.'

'No woman would I rather be, than one praised by a hero,' said she.

'What kind of woman would you be?' asked he.

She said: 'Now that I have lain beside you, it can hardly be news to such a sharp-eyed man that I have a little honey-mark on my skin. I would have you make a song about that mark, for I do not think that could be changed to fit another woman.'

He said he would certainly do her will, and it is believed to have been that very night that he made the Honey Song. When it was finished, the woman heard it gratefully and rewarded the skald with such names as Love and Jewel. Not till tonight, said she, had he deserved the name given him in his first youth, Thormod Coalbrowsskald.

But at dawn of day it befell that Thormod Coalbrowsskald thought he was lying awake and had drawn aside the bed-curtain. He lay at ease in his bed looking out at the hall. Folk were all gone about their work indoors and out. Then suddenly it grew very bright in the house, as when a storm passes over, but it was not sunshine, and there was bitter cold with the brightness. He could make no other of it, but that the walls were far further apart and the rafters far higher up than he had thought before. It amazed him that there should be so stately a dwelling in such a remote fjord. The woodwork was carved, and embellished with dragons, birds, human beings and other creatures of legend. He could not think how it was that he had not noted before what kind of house he was living in, assuredly no less splendid than the far-famed halls of ancient kings, the seat of happenings that

moved the whole World. And as he was gazing at this great hall, he heard a sound of tremendous wings over the roof.

In the same breath, the door through which the mistress had gone a moment earlier was thrown open, and in came a tall woman, pale of face, and fixing him with her eyes. She was grander to look on than all other women, and yet he thought her form was not much unlike that of his little friend at Ögur. The woman was clad, as befits a valkyrie, in a coat of chain-mail down to mid-thigh, with a belt round her waist, a great brooch like the women of old, high shoes and bare knees. Her hair was cut, so that it reached to the shoulder. This woman had a fair helm on her head, and a spear inlaid with gold. She carried her swan-skin on her arm. The woman stopped at his bedside, and spoke these words:

‘Once more you have played me false, and this time, far worse than when you ran off with Thorgeir. How am I to be used now?’

It preyed sorely on Thormod skald that a little girl, weak and slightly made, should suddenly have become a mighty earth-goddess borne on strong wings and with good weapons; and her countenance, which he had seen yesterday at parting swollen with tears, today glowered on him fearsomely under the helm of awe.

He said:

*‘Halt bestrides horses,
handless can herd.’*

‘I am the halt, one-handed lover of women, and your love is the game in which no man is a hero but he who gives up. Here Thorgeir and I part company. What shall we do now, Thordis?’

She replied: ‘Here you may sprawl your fill, in the snare that was laid for you by the evil woman whose home is the Underworld. But I shall not mourn your wretched state, till my song returns into its old bed.’

With these words she drove her spear into him, so that the point sat between his eyes. The vision dissolved, his sight darkened, his head ached as though the eyes would burst out of it, and all strength forsook him.

On the morning of the same day, Coalbrow, mistress of Ravensfjord, set out for Vermund's house with her daughter Geirrid, followed by the thrall Shaghair. All waters were ice-bound. Of their journey there is nothing to tell, till on the third day they reached Vatnsfjord.

When mother and daughter entered the hall, Vermund was in his high seat. He bade the others give place while he talked with these women. They went up to the old man and kissed him in greeting. He set the girl on a little stool at the edge of the dais, for she was his bastard ; but Coalbrow was bidden to seat herself on his own footstool, and she laid her arms fondly round the chief's legs. He asked her what was the news from home.

Mistress Coalbrow said there was hard frost now in the Jökulfjords, yet it had been harder for settled folk to endure the wrongs of incoming ruffians, who had made their home on a ledge of the fell, fished on their neighbours' boundaries and had no grazing for their cattle.

Vermund thought that was ill news.

'But happily that leak has now a cask under it.'

'All the better,' said Vermund, 'but make the tale clearer to me.'

'We were long annoyed by Ingolf and his son Thorbrand, who had your leave to come and settle in Ravensfjord, across from us on the face of the cliff where there is no soil.'

Vermund said to be sure he had received them as kinless pedlars from a wreck, but they had since been true members of his following. He asked how they did.

Coalbrow replied: 'To be brief with you, they are dead.'

I had them killed. And most are like to say that we had just cause in the wrongs they offered us.'

He asked what they had done amiss.

She said: 'They had two head of cattle, that they were for ever driving on to the land you gave me. And they grazed their milk ewes on me in summer. They drove them across other men's land and stopped only on my ground, for they knew there would be none to defend a poor widow.'

Vermund said it had been ill done to have two such good men killed for such slight offence. But whom had she found to do the killing?

'Your kinsman Thormod Bessason and his oath-brother Thorgeir stood by me in this matter,' said she. 'It was true men's work to get a poor woman her right.'

Vermund said that such work had to be paid for in his district, whoever did it. All upright men would say that it was no killing matter for a cow to gnaw a little moss on a neighbour's ground. If that were law, most folk in the west country would have forfeited their lives. But it would be worst for Vermund if those who felt that they had his countenance promoted such deeds.

Coalbrow said: 'I have kept back the men's greatest crime. I meant to spare you that news for the love I have so long borne you. Goodman Ingolf frequented my house in such a way that had you been there, you would have planned him a fate not unlike what came to him. He urged me to hand over my farm and be his trull, not his lawful wife. And many a woman might have been excused for yielding to such a man as Ingolf, for he was very accomplished and well-bred. And indeed he had sat at the jarl's table in Orkney.'

Vermund said: 'When I was younger and more active than now, I got what I would of women without manslaughter, and I had rather you kept all your sweethearts at once than set them killing each other.'

Coalbrow said: 'Still I have put off telling you of the greatest contumely that Ingolf and Thorbrand showed us. They asked the hand of your daughter Gcirrid for Thorbrand

Ingolfsson, and he was no sooner trothplight to the girl than he lay with her in my house, but the wedding was never held.'

'Are you so irksome, Geirrid,' said Vermund, 'that your betrothed runs from your arms?'

'I am thrall-born and sit among outcasts,' said the girl, 'and I had to smart for that. But luckily Thorbrand is now dead. I have loved none other like him and have not had a glad day since he left me in the lurch.'

Vermund said: 'I shall be much blamed if I let you and your mother talk me into giving your errand-boys Thormod and Thorgeir their lives. Yet some may well say that they can thank your turbulence more than their own stupidity for these doings. It is a pity the law will no longer have women burnt.'

'Now I hear you are angry with me, Vermund,' said Coalbrow. 'Will you not take a fine for the Svidinstead men from the pouch you gave me long ago, and which still hangs at my belt?'

He said: 'I will take no fine from you. And the pouch hanging at your belt you may give to other men. But now you shall make a choice. Either I will have Thormod's life, that sackless folk may not lie unatoned in my district for all to see: and Thorgeir's head into the bargain, though there are powerful men to take up the suit for him. Or else you shall leave Iceland and never return to it while I live.'

'I can hardly believe,' said she, 'that you will be base enough to have your kinsman Thormod slain, or trouble the Westfjords by jarring with the rich man at Reykjaholar for Thorgeir's sake. Thormod washed up at your door, a motherless boy, and devoted to me a little song, for which he was named Coalbrowsskald. I promised him in return that he should find shelter with me in case of need. And now he is of my household. And when he is further on in years and I have become an old crone, I mean to marry him to our daughter Geirrid.'

'My daughter shall come to no such mischief,' said Vermund. 'Truly women are as unaccountable as ever. But now I will not have you take Geirrid home to Ravensfjord.

She shall rather stay here and learn better manners than she has picked up of late. But if I do not have Thormod slain this winter, I will do with him what will please you far worse. I will get him settled and marry him to Thordis of Ögur.'

★ 17 ★

Now milder weather came in, and Thorgeir Havars-son's men wearied of being stuck in Ravensfjord without booty and without a leader. Besides, they were the less welcome the longer they stayed, till in the end they got nothing from mistress Coalbrow but tough whalemeat. That prompted them to be on their way. But since they had no stomach for sailing without a leader and cruising round Horn in wintertide, they left their vessel in the boat-shed at Skipeyri, where it had stood for a time, and took the shortest way north across the fells to seek out their leader. At last they found Thorgeir in a creek at Hornstrands. There he had settled himself in a hovel, with the starveling crofter, who had become his thrall, and three crones that were his household. Thorgeir received his fellows with joy, had them regaled to his power, and asked what news of his oath-brother Thormod Coalbrowsskald. They said he lay blind and feeble in the Jökulfjords, and could not bear a glimmer of daylight for the pains in his head.

Thorgeir was sick of playing the farmer at Hornstrands, and had a mind and appetite for further exploits. He was eager to be stirring now that he had his men back, and so it occurred to him that they should visit the farmsteads of this region and see what folk's property had to offer brave men and vikings. And in their storming about the country, certainly they obtained their needs, food, drink and shelter ;

but whether it were for lack of worldly goods in the north, or because the peasants hid such goods as were marketable, Thorgeir's profit of the place fell short of his hope, and the peasants' tameness and unwillingness to maintain their right against heroes was of a piece with it. Here was as little to do for true men as for those that sought to raise wealth by noble heart. Whenever the Hornstrands folk were urged to defend their own with weapons, the reply was that they had nothing to defend from such dauntless heroes but the live-stock crawling on them and the air in their guts, and no weapons but short knives for splitting fish and saws for drift-wood, while the murderous axes they had inherited from their fathers were devoured with rust.

Now the story moves north to Vididale and the farm called Lackjamot, and there lived a peasant who in most books is called Gils, son of Mar. Goodman Gils was a great whaler. He had sailed the seas in his youth and been a man among men and prospered in trade. He was one of the foremost men of his district, after those that had authority and a seat in the Aldething. It was his habit to row out to banks and common beaches after great fish, seals and birds.

At this time a whale stranded on the eastern Commons, at the foot of the cliffs. When it washed ashore, Gils Másson happened to be near by in his boat with his four thralls, and they were first at the carcase. Thorgeir Havarsson heard of the whale. He at once fitted out a boat with tools and what else was needed, meaning to get himself train-oil, which is a gainful commodity. Gils and his men had been cutting whale for two days when Thorgeir beached his boat. They exchanged greetings and fell into talk. Thorgeir said:

'You have got some way with the whale, and now it is time you took breath and prepared to go home and give others a turn.'

Gils Másson replied that he was not much for leaving the whale, but no one forbade them to join in; it was a common whale, and each should have what he cut.

Thorgeir said they would share the whale between them, both cut and uncut.

Gils Másson replied: 'We shall not give up what is cut. But what men are you?'

Thorgeir gave his name, and said he and his fellows were not so timorous as to endure browbeating or provocation.

'You have chosen the worse part,' said he. 'Now you may do battle with us. And then we shall see how long you can keep the whale against us.'

Gils said: 'It is no surprise that a champion like you should seek to be famed for something other than giving chase to the most miserable of all runagate cow-suckers and well-pissers that have ever plagued the Westfjords, and that without coming at him. It is the jest of all Iceland, how the champion let a tramp lead him by the nose. You must be right stupid.'

Thorgeir said that on his stupidity as in any other case, only weapons could give true and binding judgment.

'Just as well,' said goodman Gils.

Now both sides took their weapons and prepared for the fight. Thorgeir chose to fight with Gils, whose courage was proved in battle.

'I would fain make known on you who I am,' said he.

He warned the rest not to meddle in their combat, and sent his fellows off to the gravel north of the whale's jaw to fight with Gils' men.

It was old Northern custom and much practised in Iceland to make sure of the first blow. True manhood lay in spitting an enemy or cutting off his head before he could wink. Thenadays men killed each other not for the sport of it but for what they could get, and feats of arms were judged by the outcome. Long afterwards the French minstrels in their songs made it a fashion to prefer slaughters that were done with art and courtesy. That was the time of chivalry, but then the Icelanders were fighting with stones.

Now in warfare it seldom happens so luckily, that one man can fall on another unawares or murder him in his bed. Bands may also run into each other willy-nilly on open ground in daylight, and then it comes to a fight. In Iceland these were fought out in the old Northern style; man paired

off with man, and then they banged away at each other while their strength lasted, with blunt and notched meat-axes, for the Northmen were clumsy smiths and besides their iron was bad. They did not know how to wield a sword, though chiefs carried these weapons from vainglory. But when dogged men swung axes in battle, and especially if rage seized them, these choppers were commonly better than splendid swords forged in the far south, or in France and England.

It was a main thing to get home at the adversary where he was unshielded, in the flank or from behind. And the scuffle went on till one or other dropped down with weariness or took to his heels. Victory went to him that had lungs to bang longest; and he that was first to tire was knocked senseless, or had his head split open where he sat, lay or squatted. But though some books teach that the Northmen had axes so sharp that they split men lengthways like laths, cut off heads and limbs without a chopping-block, and halved a fleeing enemy at one blow, so that he fell to the ground in two pieces, in our judgment these are the dreams of dull-weaponed folk.

Gils Másson was past his youth, and therefore wearied quicker than Thorgeir Havarsson, nor had he the lust of youth to display his Asa-strength. Gils stumbled on the pebbles, and Thorgeir heaved up the axe and crushed his skull, so that blood and brains welled out of the gap. If a man had used his unfriend so rudely that his life was ebbing and he seemed unlike to get up again, it was the ancient way of the North to show him no further malice, but to nurse him while he gave up the ghost, and tend his corpse honourably. This was true manhood. And thus Thorgeir did; he sat with Gils' head in his lap, till the man died.

When goodman Gils was dead, Thorgeir went after his fellows, that he had appointed to fight Gils' men on the beach north of the whale-jaw. He found them all unhurt, and there had not been much fighting done. They were sitting by the whale, sharing like brothers what the Vididale folk had brought from home. There was a cutting of great

hunks of lambs-flank, and chewing of shark. Thorgeir said that in no olden story he knew had such worthless thralls been in the train of brisk men. Such recreants, that indulged the belly while their master was fighting, ought to be put to death. From ancient times, serving-men had made it a point of honour to risk life for their leaders.

They asked with loud belchings what had happend. For hunger' sake, they had been too faint to watch the dispute of their chiefs. Thorgeir said Gils' Másson was dead. At these tidings the swagger went out of the Hunafjord men. They got up with their jaws full, brought the axes, knives and other edged tools they had used for cutting the whale, and laid them at Thorgeir's feet. Thorgeir said:

'Truly I have no mind to kill such a pack of old women, though it would be right. Get aboard and be off to Hunafjord, take your master with you, but let the whale be.'

They said they would do his bidding.

Now Thorgeir and his henchmen had the whale to themselves, cut and uncut; the Hornstrands folk dared not come near, nor did they get any. Thorgeir sent for kettles, lit fires and melted the blubber that did not run out of itself, and he bought frieze of the peasants for whalemeat.

One day at winter's end, Thorgeir left Hornstrands with his folk and set off across the fells to the Jökulfjords to reclaim his ship and fetch Thormod Coalbrowsskald. Thormod could not bear the light, no glimmer of day was too faint to be the death of him; nor could he endure the sound of a human voice; he thought it must drive him mad. He could take only the food given to young children, a mouthful of halibut or broiled rayfish and a drink of warm milk. Coalbrow mixed him all the lifegiving drinks known in the Jökulfjords or in Isafjord Deep. All winter he lay with the bed-cutain drawn, the smoke-hole stopped and the door shut fast. The housewife never budged from his side day or night. By day she sat on the edge of his bed in the dark, cautiously plying her distaff. He could not bear it if she allowed too long to go by without taking him in her arms like a crying child.

Thorgeir and his men got their ship fitted out and into the water. While they were at work, a huge seal-cow lay on the headland, gazing at them with malignant human eyes. Then they rowed the ship homewards under the hill that is called after the witch-woman Fljod. The seal was now lying on a rock on the beach, and never took its eyes from them. They had no doubt it was an uncanny seal. They found the thrall Shaghair and Thorgeir asked him where Thormod Bessason was. The thrall replied:

'I know not what abjects may be hiding in the mistress's corners. Look for yourselves before asking other folk.'

Mistress Coalbrow had the skald locked in her arms when they burst the door open and the sun shone in. Thormod had lost the flesh and colours of youth during the winter

and was now shrunken, nerveless and pale, while the mistress was even sleeker and ampler than before and ruddier in the face. When the guests came in, she rose from the bed, covered the skald up with the quilt and went on spinning.

'Low have you laid yourself, brother', said Thorgeir Havarsson.

Thormod said: 'Greater me, than I have lain down.'

'I will lie down when I am dead,' said Thorgeir Havarsson, 'but not for a woman.'

And with these words he tore yarn and distaff from the mistress's hands and flung them both on the ground.

Calmly the mistress rose from her chair and said:

'It is in my mind, Thorgeir Havarsson, that you are to lie lowest for men so base that there can be no vengeance on them. But I say to you, Thormod, my friend and skald, that though today you let this champion tear you from my embrace, and though you should live to be luck's esquire and king's skald, we have been so near each other this winter, that nowhere shall you find peace but in the arms in which I have locked you.'

With these words the housewife took up her yarn and distaff from the floor and left the house.

'It would be well done to kill that night-hag, who has too long been sucking your blood, Thormod,' said Thorgeir. 'Throw the doors wide, men, cut the turf from the smoke-hole, and make haste to harpoon that seal that was lying on a rock under the infield, and bring it here to the bed alive.'

And when they had harpooned the seal and dragged it indoors, Thorgeir ordered them to bleed it and let the blood run into a dipper. Then they gave Thormod to drink, and as he felt the hot seal-blood running down his throat, the mist went from his eyes, the strength returned to his limbs, he dressed himself and took up his weapons. Thorgeir Havarsson now led him to the ship. The skald had forgotten all women when he drank the seal-blood, and his fancy was again set on notable deeds. They went aboard, hoisted sail and steered out of the Jökulfjords, rounded Rytagnup and set course for Horn. It is told that the sail was hardly up

when Thormod Coalbrowsskald came so far to himself as to think of skaldship again. All winter his tongue had failed him, when he would have made verses. It is told for sure, that on this cruise he changed back the song he had made for Thordis of Ögur, but had since given his fostermother Coalbrow as the fee of love.

The time that now follows, some learned men have called the oath-brothers' golden time. It is said that fate was then kindlier to them than before and after.

And one day Thormod was walking at the foot of the cliffs looking for birth-stones. The sun was dazzling. He grew heavy in the head and sat down on a stone on the beach. Then he saw that the cliff had opened, and in a cave sat two women, so busily employed as to heed nothing else. They were majestic women, one had dark brows, and the other was fair. One seemed to him a witch-woman and the other a valkyrie. They were bandying a little egg between them without a pause, while they said this stave:

*Friendly our hands
heedfully bandy
the hero's life-egg:
both are his chosen,
all is our own,
and the halves make one.*

'What do you give him?' said the dark woman, whose home is the Underworld.

And she of the sun's hue replied: 'I will give him a dwelling-place, the most bounteous in Isafjord Deep, carl and cow, land and home, all the good things of Iceland; I give him two daughters, one shall be fair as Moon, the other as Star, but I will be Sun to him. But what do you give him?'

The witch-woman replied: 'I give him the depths of want at the World's edge, and bring forth to him daughters black as Hel, they shall be named Night, Mute and Waste. But, in my embrace he shall find the Nonsuch that Heaven and Earth cannot match, nor add to nor surpass, as long as the World stands and the gods live.'

With these words she got up and entered the mountain, taking with her Thormod Coalbrowsskald's life-egg.

★ 19 ★

They set their men fishing and taking other quarry, and at night sailed the ship into little creeks. They never strayed far from the ship. They had much pastime from the sport of searching the cliffs for eggs and birds. A man lowers himself over the crest on a rope and takes his spoil from shelves and rock-fissures. These bird-cliffs are often of a hundred fathoms or more, and then he feels safer when he has left all foothold and is hanging free in the air, than while working his way over the edge. This is one of the chief delights of Hornstrands.

They made fires in caves, and even at times under open sky, for the beach abounds in fuel. When it was mild weather, they slept on shore in a tent. If a change came, they marched on the farms and offered to fight for sleeping quarters, but the peasants gave up their beds without a word. Boys and young women gazed on the champions enthralled, and could see little in other men when those two were by. The young girls offered to do their washing, and some to rub lye into their heads. But there was not much slaughter or plunder going, for the goodmen were defended by poverty and petty heart.

On light and still evenings, the oath-brothers often sat together on the grassy ridge of Horn, which looks northwest over sea to the World's end. They saw great fish furrowing the surface, and whales blowing clouds into the air. Dolphins leapt, and seals played, and a school of porpoises headed due north for the bottomless deep. Often their talk was of how a man with the means to run down this game and get teeth

and blubber from it would have merchandise enough to set up a longship, and make war on more valiant nations than the Hornstrands folk. It happened too that swans came flying over the sea, stretched their necks in flight, and set up a cry. Then the champions were silent, for they knew these were the Warfather's maids, the women above other women, they that elect heroes for Valhalla but will have nothing to do with cowards. The highest wisdom in the World, said the oath-brothers, was to mark the roar of their wings and read their flight.

One day, as they sat on the verge of the cliff with an eye on their men fishing below, these words passed between them. Thormod said :

'Can there be anywhere in the Westfjords two men as sprightly and glad as we?'

'I cannot tell,' said Thorgeir. 'But it seems to me of more consequence that there should nowhere be tidings of two such brisk men keeping company in the Westfjords or anywhere else ; and may the hour never come when one of us will ask any for life or favour.'

Thormod Coalbrowsskald said: 'Can there be a better place than where we now live? No man ventures on us, all as one give up our requirements without ado, and women beg leave to kill our lice.'

Thorgeir said: 'I think any place would be better than here, if it supplied enemies worthy that we should kill them or fall before their weapons.'

'And yet it is not long since Egil Skallagrimsson, who was the greatest hero in Iceland and the best skald, died by the kitchen fire among crones,' said Thormod.

'No man is a hero, when he is well married and has fair daughters like Egil,' said Thorgeir. 'A hero is he that fears not man, nor god or creature nor sorcery or black art nor himself or his fate, and challenges all to holmgang until he bites the dust under his enemy's weapon, and only he is a skald who swells this man's praise.'

Thormod said: 'Can there anywhere be two men who

are such good friends that there is never a rift in their harmony and oath-brotherhood, come what will?’

Thorgeir replied: ‘Nothing is surer than that friendship will be firmest between two men who are such champions that neither has to seek help of the other in any strait, till one of them falls, whereupon the other at once avenges him.’

In the cliff-walls rearing out of the water by this the uttermost sea, high up on ledges narrow and hard to reach, there grows a lifegiving weed, not to be matched for scent, savour and healing. This weed has a hollow stalk nearly the height of a man; the upper part is pliant and sweet and a cure for most ills, and for the sweetness in the weed it was called lovewort by heathen men; but Christian men have named it in Latin after the angels and archangels whose seat is nearest the throne of Christ in the home of the blessed.

In late spring the oath-brothers were wont to clamber down to rock-ledges for angelica. One fine day when they were at this pastime, Thorgeir so lost himself in cutting angelica that he had no sense of the verge crumbling beneath him, where he stood on the face of a scaur, and lost his footing. The rock was so loose that a man’s weight was enough to break down the scaur. But since no valkyrie had yet elected the champion, in his fall he caught hold of an angelica-stem, rising from thin grass in a crevice of the rock, and there he hung. Below him were a hundred fathoms, but above him only a few fathoms up to the brow, and a narrow path led there. On the face of the cliff, where Thorgeir now hung, was neither notch, spur nor other foothold, nor grip or handhold to lift himself up, nor anything but the paltry stalk which was now his life-thread.

Of Thormod it is to be said, that he had climbed down on another ledge to cut angelica, and stayed there a good while longer than purposed. The oath-brothers could not see each other. When Thormod had cut his fill, he made the weeds into a bundle, took it on his back and hoisted

himself by narrow shelves up to the crest. It was still weather, flat calm and sun from a clear sky. He lay down on the verge to await his oath-brother, and was lulled asleep by the screaming of the cliff-birds. The oath-brothers were not so far apart but that Thormod might have heard Thorgeir with ease if he would only have raised his voice. But on this old books agree, that nothing was further from Thorgeir's mind as he hung on the cliff than to pronounce his oath-brother's name with intent to beg favour of him. Thormod now slept on Hornbjarg till late in the day.

It is told that at last he woke up. He wondered what had become of his oath-brother, and began calling out from the brow. Thorgeir made no answer. Then Thormod climbed down on a ledge and called so loud that birds flew up all over the cliff. Then at last Thorgeir spoke from below:

'Give over scaring birds with your shouting.'

Thormod asked what was staying him.

Thorgeir replied: 'No matter what is staying me.'

Thormod asked if he had not enough angelica.

Then Thorgeir Havarsson spoke these words, long to be remembered in the Westfjords:

'I think I shall have enough, when the one I hold is gathered.'

Thormod now began to suspect that all was not well with his oath-brother's angelica-cutting; he made haste down to the ledge where Thorgeir had slipped, and on peering over could see his oath-brother hanging from the cliff. The stalk was now very ragged, and near to parting. Thormod threw a rope's end down to his oath-brother and pulled him up on the scaur. Then they went up the narrow path to the cliff-top.

Thorgeir Havarsson did not thank his oath-brother for the good turn, or give him any sign that it had been welcome. Rather it was as though he had some illwill at Thormod for what had happened, and things were poorer between the oath-brothers from that time.

One evening some country fellows rowed up under the cliff in a small boat. They had three men from another district with them. Thorgeir saw at once that these were from Reykjaholar, from his kinsmen Thorgils. The leader was one of the Thorgils' foremen. These three gave the oath-brothers friendly greeting. Thorgeir asked them not to take it amiss that there were no comforts but sea-beaten rocks; yet he bade them sit down, and told one henchman to cut them seal-blubber and another to guard their boat.

These men said they had made the journey on horseback over moors and glaciers, and their horses were not far off. They came as messengers from the yeoman of Reykjaholar, to say that Thorgeir Havarsson had been outlawed at the Öxar-river Thing for his killing of Gils Másson, and was to go abroad that summer. They said fines had been paid for the comrades' other killings. The Westfjord chiefs had had a hand in the agreement, and Bessi Halldorsson had paid for his son's share in Thorgeir's deeds. The messengers also brought word from Thorgils that there was a trading-ship lying at Rif with sails hoisted, ready to put out for Orkney. Thorgils Arason was part owner, and it was his will that the oath-brothers should make haste to get aboard and leave the country.

'Can we do other than follow your kinsman Thorgils' advice?' asked Thormod. 'For our lives are forfeit under the law, so that any in this country may kill us at pleasure.'

'We follow no man's advice,' said Thorgeir. 'But we do wisely to take time by the forelock, and sail out in quest of such kings or other worthy chiefs as desire heroes and

skalds in their service. It is grown too thrallish for me, to hear grumbling of clowns in a kingless land.'

Their goods were stored away under mounds of pebbles and driftwood; they had seal-blubber, whale-belly and oil, besides some friezecloth they had extorted from the peasants. Fish and seal-meat were hung up to dry on rocks and poles.'

'This is good merchandise, and we cannot get on without our stores,' said Thormod.

The messengers said they had not horses enough to carry it over steep moors on the long fell-road.

'And how did you come by it?' said they.

Thorgeir said that the merchandise here collected had been more honestly come by than most, since it had been won in battle by true manhood and cost good men's lives. Though to be sure some had been fished by thralls, and some forced from cowards. Yet since the oath-brothers now had their mind on loftier matters than fish and oil, for his part he was content to leave it to the gulls. But when they were to go aboard together, their followers sat down on the rock and declared they would not get up, but would stay here. They were swathed in rags and their feet almost naked.

Then said Thorgeir Havarsson: 'Now it can be seen that like thralls you set the belly above the honour there is in following champions. No true man lets himself be stayed by the cattle he has hewn down, or oil he has tapped from other folk's whales. No booty can compare with the thought of having harried a countryside at will, and left it without being forced to make peace or terms, or endure any favour but what we ourselves have chosen to grant.'

They replied: 'Now you are running from your promise, and mean to give birds the wealth we got for you with sore toil, and drag us away empty-handed into the unknown. Yet we have risked life for you, and our honour too, small though it were, and these rags that cover us are more worn-out than when we first joined you, and then they were thin; and there are men in your following who have not recovered of their frost-bite last winter, and may fear lifelong injury. Now we

see what comes of being less discreet than Louse-Oddi, who chose to flee with a man here at Hornstrands who was cleverer than you, Thorgeir, and could have been your death's-man if he had thought you worth the trouble of killing as you slept under his axe.'

Thorgeir Havarsson said: 'Why not hew down these birds of ill omen here on the cliff?'

Thorgils Arason's men were more anxious to make all speed back to their horses and be off home than to begin a slaughter. They desired the oath-brothers not to give battle to these vagrants and thus draw out the time to no use. The sea was running higher against the cliff, and the oarsmen had all they could do to keep the boat steady. The end of it was that the oath-brothers went aboard. Their ragged henchmen were not killed that time, but settled themselves on the abandoned spoil.

The others put into a cove where the horses were, and then rode homeward by passes, glaciers and moors, wherever a horse could tread. At night they stayed in the fjords. And in settled places it was a great event when such champions as Thorgeir Havarsson and Thormod Coalbrowsskald came riding by. Young men thronged out to gaze at them, and women peeped from the doors.

There was clear sunshine with a breeze off the glacier, and the oath-brothers were in good spirits. But when they were halfway the paths began to split up, so that they could not always tell which was the best. The oath-brothers were riding ahead of their companions. There was a beaten path along the bank of a river, and as they discussed ways and course, they saw a man walking against the wind with a load of brushwood on his back, and the wind tore at his burden, so that he had ado to stand firm. Thorgeir shouted to this man across the river, asking his name and where the ways led. But the roar of wind and water closed the man's ears to the shouting of the traveller, and so there was no reply. Thorgeir shouted again twice or thrice, but the brushwood-carrier went on his way and made no answer.

Thorgeir said: "That man is not scanty foolish, to think he

need not deign Thorgeir Havarsson and his oath-brother a look."

'I suspect that his eyes are weak,' said Thormod. 'He gropes in his tread, as blind men do.'

'Then why does he not answer, when the greatest champions in the Westfjords call out to him?' said Thorgeir. 'I will not suffer him to make light of us.'

'May he not be deaf?' said Thormod.

Thorgeir said: 'In what olden tales do we learn that a man ever saved his life by shamming deaf and blind when a warrior was riding by? I take it for sure that the man has heard and seen us, and will count us weaklings if we let him escape.'

With that he drove his horse into the river, rode across to the man and thrust his spear through him. The man dropped under his burden, clutched at the wound in his chest and groaned. Thorgeir jumped from his horse and set about cutting the man's head off; it was sluggish work, for the champion's sword was dull though his heart were good. Yet at last the head parted from the body, and the man lay in two pieces by his bundle of twigs and was dead. Then Thorgeir rode back across the river to Thormod. At that moment their fellow-travellers from Reykjaholar caught them up. They said this was doughtily done, as one might expect of a champion. Not far off there was a little farm on a hill, with a woman raking the infield and children by the beck. Thorgeir rode up to it and published the killing, saying that here was the champion with the best heart in the Westfjords. And it was always a wonder to folk how fearless Thorgeir Havarsson was.

Towards evening, when they had ridden for some time by the sea, they came to a shoal under steep cliffs. In this place a man can go dryshod over the sands at ebb, but at flood there is no passage for men or horses. They must either wait for the water to go down, or take bad roads over the fell. The water had risen fairly high when they came to the shoal. The men from Reykjaholar were in front, while the oath-brothers lagged far behind, talking of such things as were always

nearest their hearts. Thormod said the happiest man was he that wrought runes for the fair in the night hours, but Thorgeir, he that carved battle-runes while day shone; and he said, as before, that it was better for a man to be laid low by the weapons of his enemies than to bow down to a woman.

And as they debated this, they came to the shoal. They got off their horses, tightened the girths and let them graze. Then Thorgeir said softly:

‘Though you are a man that loves women, Thormod, yet it is not to be concealed that I know none to match you with weapons. Never have I seen you brought down in a game; and I often wonder which of us oath-brothers would be the best, if we tried our strength.’

Thormod said then, ‘I have often watched by your side at night, Thorgeir, while you were asleep, and seen your chest stir with the beating of the heart I know to be prouder than all other hearts, and fixed my eyes on your neck. Never has stronger column borne a man’s head.’

Thorgeir said: ‘Why did you not strike me then?’

‘You have no cause to ask,’ said Thormod. ‘You might well remember coming to me by night, when I was with the woman who is nearer my heart than other women; then it needed only a word of your mouth for me to leave her and go on board with you, cold as it was. And when I see you asleep, nothing rejoices me more than what I have learnt from the Spear-King, Mimir’s friend, that one day I shall hold your bloody head in my living hands, since then it will be for these pliant and weak bones to seek revenge, in fulfilment of our vow to the Earth. And now you shall ride foremost across the shoal.’

Thorgeir now perceived that the tide was much higher, and their companions far in the distance; speedily he urged his horse into the rising water, between the face of the cliff and a great wave rolling inshore. Thormod paused to see how things would go with his oath-brother; the water was soon breaking over the horse’s loins, and grew so deep that it had to swim. Thorgeir had scarcely passed over, when the sea hurled itself at the cliff. He got off his horse on the far side,

and signed to Thormod to ride over. But when Thormod would have mounted his horse, it had made off up the fell, and indeed the ford between the oath-brothers was gone. Thormod made a trumpet of his hands and called out:

'I know not which of us would be best in single combat; but you have now spoken the words for which we part company and fellowship; and I see it still rankles with you that I saved your life this summer.'

'Those words were not thought out,' cried Thorgeir Havarsson.

'But thought, when you spoke them,' replied Thormod, 'and how often before? Here for a time our ways part. Farewell and good luck.'

With that Thormod turned back, made his way to the nearest farm, and asked for horses to go home to his father at Laugabol.

★ 21 ★

Thorgeir Havarsson went on south to Rif, and aboard the ship awaiting him, in which Thorgils Arason had a share. The men were merchants after this style, that they chattered when there was occasion, and plundered like other Northmen when they met folk who did not look as if they could defend their belongings. They had mild weather at first, but then the wind rose, and they thought to put in at Shetland after a short time on the open sea; there they would buy silver with their cargo. But just as they seemed to be making land the wind dropped, and they came into sleet and mist and lingering sea-fog. Thenadays the lodestone was unknown, and troubles waxed whenever the lodestar was hidden. They ran off their course and drifted day after day, till the ship ended its cruise by smashing against rocks,

filling and going to the bottom. Many lost their lives, and all the master shipmen were drowned. But it is told that seven escaped from this wreck, and were washed up on a barren skerry by night, spent and piteous. Thorgeir Havarsson was among the saved ; he was wearing a smock and the short, one-edged sword that never quitted him. In the night one asked how he did. Thorgeir Havarsson replied :

‘I am in good case and have abundance, while I have my sword to kill such as are not to my mind.’

At dawn the fog lifted ; the castaways looked about them and saw that they were on one of a group of skerries on a rocky coast, not far from land. Among them was an old seaman, who said he knew that country, and it was Ireland. They did not think they could swim ashore, sodden as they were. There was no means of lighting a fire on the skerry, and they had neither food nor water. They took it in turns to stand on the highest point of the skerry waving a cloth. They could plainly see threads of smoke rising from human dwellings on land, and the buildings were mirrored in the air when the sun grew hot ; fair castles appeared, and towers rearing aloft with shining crosses. But the landsmen seemed to have something better to do than look after castaways. And when it was Thorgeir Havarsson’s turn with the flag, the others called him ; but he replied :

‘Late shall it be said of Thorgeir Havarsson that he flapped a clout to entreat help. I had rather be a corpse than a cadger. It was never foretold me that I should meet with the disaster of accepting favour from any. Sooner will I die here on this rock than endure abasement.’

Three days went by, and the castaways got neither food to eat nor water to drink. They saw bodies of their fellows washed up on the skerries around. And those on their own skerry dwindled. They grew numb as they sat on the rocks at night, and so death took them.

When the sun rose on the fourth day, there were three alive on the skerry, Thorgeir Havarsson and two traders. But on the same day a boat put out from the shore. Three men rowed out to the skerry, and one was the oldest and their

leader. They were all sore afflicted with boils and their faces disfigured with ulcers and swellings; but the ancient was the most frightful, he looked as though the skin of a lion's head had been turned fleshy side out. These men gazed unswervingly up to heaven, and sang and responded in time with the oars. They brought their boat alongside, and the ancient clutched his cross, tottered up on the skerry, and bade the castaways welcome. They had long been so numb that they had scarcely the power to return his greeting. He addressed them in sundry tongues, and at last the Northern tongue, asking who they were. They said they were traders whose vessel had broken up, that some of their shipmates, were drowned, while others sat frozen and lifeless on the skerry, and that two had expired that very night. The ancient asked them to pardon him and his folk that they had not been speedier to bring them off the skerry and tend them.

'For three days and nights we have had neither rest nor leisure from exalting the tooth of our guardian spirit, St. Belinda; we could not stand up for tears, praises and amazement at that blessed and most laudable tooth; and this remembrance we keep for three full days and nights four times a year. But now that this festival of grace is over, we have made all haste to seek you and invite those of you who are still alive to be our lords, as we are your servants for the sake of Christ, son of Mary, whom we Irish name Josa mac Dé; but over those that are departed we will sing what is needful.'

The traders said there was little need to sing over those that were dead, and more to refresh those that gave signs of life.

Thorgeir Havarsson said:

'Truly I would not be sundered here from my fellows that still draw breath, yet you shall know that I am a Northman from Iceland, and we do not suffer ourselves to be bought with benefactions. It is not worth thanks to us that you save our lives, if our hands are not as free as before. And you had best hew us down on the spot, if you would have peace with us.'

The ancient lifted his cross high in the air as Thorgeir Havarsson was speaking, and responded out of the holy books, in the words that begin: Love them that hate you. Then he kissed him tenderly, and bade him be welcome from that country where, he had assurance from books, the sun shone so clear by night that a man could see to pick lice out of his shirt. The castaways said no more at that time, but got into the boat, and the papas sang an anthem of praise from the Psalterium and then took to their oars.

But as they drew near land, the place showed fewer tokens of wealth than the sky-image. There were indeed numerous ruins of old houses; but only those of little account were still standing; most were paltry hovels of stone and rubble, going up in a point like fish-clamps. The only building of note was a low church, with a cone-shaped spire under a wooden cross. The clerks had their abode in sheds scattered about the hills. There were no cattle, but goats were gnawing trees and bleating at those that went by. The castaways were led into a dark dwelling-house. There was a gust of cold through it. They were served with goat's milk in wooden mugs and coarse bread of chaff. That was the whole meal. When it was over, the papas said that they had yet much to sing in honour of Christ and could do no more for the castaways at this turn. They invited them to lie down under the south wall and hunt their lice.

Now that life was safe, the traders began lamenting; they had put all they owned into the cargo that was sunk, and each bewailed his loss to his power. One had a wife in Shetland, the other children in Orkney. Their friends seemed to them far off. Thorgeir Havarsson said he had only one grief in his heart: not yet to have found a king so fierce and deedy that he spared neither woman nor child, and flung traders into a bog that had no bottom. He said they should rather throw off their sorrow by keeping in steadfast memory how the papas had left their fellows to pine away on the skerry for three days, and mashed up bran and filth for the living and offered them a wall to sleep

by. It would be manlier, he said, to tear down the papas' sanctuary than to lament what was lost.

Though the traders were not as bloody as Thorgeir Havars-son, they grew disgusted with their long sitting against the wall, where they saw no living creatures but goats and heard only the birds. They rose to search out what there might be of value in this place, and whether weapons were hidden there; but they found nothing to any purpose. In each shed was a cross made of two rough planks tied with bast. There was one wooden bowl in each hovel. The sleeping-places were only stalls with a flag-stone to lie on and a stone for pillow. But when they peered through cracks in the church door, they could see the clerks sitting in choir and chanting. They thought the song right tedious and could make little of it. The clerks sang on till late in the day, and the guests stood at the door considering what they should do.

At last the papas had sung their fill and began to leave the sanctuary. There was joy in their looks, meagre and bony though they were, swollen with sores and rottenness, defiled with filth and pus. Each made off into his shed, like creeping things under stones.

Last came the Master, who had fetched the traders off the skerry that morning. He greeted his guests and bade them home to supper, which they received thankfully. He lived in a mean shed, where the wind slunk around the walls and there were only stones to sit on. A very ragged papa waited at table. The Master asked how they did, now at the day's end, and Thorgeir answered for them and said the lice had been drowned. The meal was served in two bowls; in one was seaweed, and in the other only water. The papa presented this cheer with song and genuflection. The Master received the food and thanked Christ with antiphona and blessing and other praises. Then he took a fistful of seaweed and laid it aside for the poor. After that he bade his guests help themselves.

The merchants took what was set before them rather than go unfed, yet spitting out fleas and maggots; but Thorgeir sat glowering by, and said he did not eat seaweed. The

Master fell to with gusto, like a sybarite pampering his mouth at a rich man's feast. He devoured the seaweed with all its vermin and worms, talking much with his guests the while of Holy Writ; he told especially how Christ had filled five thousand men with three small loaves and two little fishes, and had twelve baskets over. The merchants applauded his tale from courtesy, but Thorgeir Havarsson said:

'I am not here to listen to olden tales, but to take your life and goods or die by your hand. I reckon all that folk have as mine, unless they gain the victory over me. If you have a life-egg or wand or the like sorceries, you shall bring them out and I will smash them; but your treasure that is being hidden from us you shall lay open.'

'What would you have of us, brothers?' asked the ancient.

Thorgeir said: 'Silver and gold and teeth of walrus and whale.'

Then the ancient said: 'We enjoy abounding wealth in our souls, which Josa mac Dé bought of our enemy and delivered into God's mercy; but of teeth we have none, save that which was taken from the mouth of the virgin Belinda, which we have just been serving. Today we have borne it out to its casket, there to await the approach of Yule.'

'What weapons have you?' asked Thorgeir Havarsson.

'Only that,' said the papa, 'to which all conquerors must bow, poverty in Christ.'

Thorgeir asked how he made that out.

The papa said: 'Before the Romans, who ruled over the greatest empire of the World, had lifted Christ up on the gibbet, they first cut his coat in pieces and shared it among them. But in the hour when he was nailed naked to the cross, he became not only conqueror of Rome but seigneur of Creation.'

'I never heard that from my oath-brother Thormod,' said Thorgeir Havarsson, 'and yet he is a good skald. But it is hard to see how you can win victories.'

The ancient said: 'There was a time when this was the richest sanctuary and the noblest cloister in Ireland, till the

sons of Loclann came under bark-brown sails, Fingalkn or Dungalkn we call them. They pulled down our cloister and murdered all us brothers and burnt in one day the books we had been five hundred years compiling; they also destroyed all the brethren's holy things, and all that could be turned into money they carried off. This havoc the sons of Loclann wrought eighteen times. At last the brethren grew weary of rebuilding the sanctuary; we even began to doubt whether Christ were the true king of Heaven and Earth, since he did not stir when his friends were so roughly used; but then he dispatched the angel Michael out of Heaven, to set us on the right path. Michael spoke thus: "Ye shall know that the sons of Loclann, who sail black ships, are powerless to change the colour of their hair, but Christ has made them his hammer to demolish this sanctuary eighteen times, because the brethren were slow to conceive and honour his love. His message is, that if any of his friends on Earth seek to exalt themselves above the poor, they shall be called his enemies, and their houses, how grandly soever they are built, shall be the gates of Hell, and Christ will demolish them; and their books, howsoever learnedly and judiciously compiled, shall be burnt to ashes; and though you may vaunt the bones of saints that have been the surest patrons of kings and dukes in the Kingdom of Heaven, and preen yourselves on the splinter you bought from the holy cross, you shall have no comfort, so long as you exalt yourselves above the poor. Send your relics to heathendom, the best you own, there to beget works and miracles of the Almighty among evil-doers and unbelievers; and every bell and image, book or cross, chalice or chest you shall bury deep in the ground, and slaughter your cows for them that need. But for yourselves you shall buy nothing but a tooth of the virgin whose fame is least among holy maids; when she was ravished at twelve years old, on the day of the resurrection of God's Mother, she set this tooth in the nose of her defiler; and it is honoured in the Kingdom of Heaven above all other teeth; and indeed it is three

inches long and four broad. Belinda is the name of the virgin.”’

The traders were greatly amazed at these tidings, and said truly it could be no vulgar tooth, and desired to know how much silver the brothers would take for it.

The ancient replied: ‘O! the power of this tooth it may be said briefly, that the year after we had sold our possessions and bought the tooth, the Northmen again visited us; and when they found nothing of price, and none but barefooted men, they hewed down such of us as were of discreet age, and flung our bodies into the sea as food for sharks, but took our heads aboard ship; for they thought that without heads we should never get to Christ our redeemer. But those of us who were still in our childhood they bound and carried to foreign parts and sold for merchandise. And that time, when the sons of Loclann were gone, nothing remained in this place but our blood on the rocks—and the most laudable maid Belinda’s tooth.’

Then the traders were in two minds, when it appeared that the tooth did not always bring victory.

‘How did you get back, papas’, they asked, ‘when your heads had been carried away on ships?’

The Master said: ‘The archangel Michael revealed himself to us when we had been hewn down. He sang antiphona and Psalterium over us, and spoke as follows:

“There is no relic powerful enough to defend him who trusts in himself, his might and heart, beauty or health, wit or learning. Whosoever among you puts most faith in these shall be first to fall. For there is but one that is fair and hale, witty and learned, glorious in heart and might, and his name is Josa mac D . Now you have either been made a head shorter and thrown to sharks, or haggled over in foreign lands, and some of you have been sold for honey and others for tar. So it goes with all who rely on what mortals find most deceitful. But since Christ is instead of friends to you, he has sent me to promise a pledge of love, which alone can open to you the gate of Heaven.”’

The traders asked what pledge, and whether it could be used to establish gainful marts.

The ancient said: 'Now I will make answer to your first question, how we came back here after we were beheaded and sold. In few words, the same that have bought us tonight, we sell tomorrow; poor men you behead at sunset shall arise one and all with two heads at dawn; and those you now cast into chains shall ere long be borne on wings. But only so shall mortals triumph over their enemies, if they first offer up to Christ wealth and fame, beauty and health, strength and wit, learning and great heart. And when we brethren again raised the sanctuary over Belinda's tomb, the angel had smitten us with those tumours which are named malatus or leprosy and are the dearest pledge of Christ's love, for by their virtue Paradise was opened to the poor man Lazarus on the selfsame day that the rich man burned. And none of the sons of Lochlann have since ventured on us.'

At these tidings Thorgeir Havarsson rose and went out. He blundered among the sheds for a while, but at last found a path leading into open country. It seemed to him an ill omen that the goats bleated after him.

★ 22 ★

Now we bring into this story a man that was named Thorkel Strutharaldsson and called the Tall. Some authorities number him with the Jomsvikings, but in English books he is called a Swede. Thorkel had ranged far and wide with his viking fleet and fought many battles, for his own hand or in the service of kings and dukes, fighting whom they would. The vikings got their pay in advance and shared the spoil after victory. If they saw that the king they were backing would have the worse, it was their custom to

join his enemies, and turn on the quondam friends with the same zeal they had shown in fighting for them. They always chose to be where there was spoil to divide.

Thorkel the Tall was mostly victorious in fight, and his band was the resort of many lesser fellows who had few ships, and too small a force to harry where there were trainbands. Yet Thorkel was often short of folk, since his men had briefer lives than fame. Many died of cold, wet and hardship and the manifold ills that attack men at sea ; but some were killed on forays or taken prisoner, and there were many deserters. Thorkel was wont therefore to have men abroad seeking recruits to fill up the ranks. Chiefly they scraped up runagates from the North, eager for adventure and glory, but with little or nothing to live on. And in this manner the champion Thorgeir Havarsson came from Ireland into Thorkel the Tall's band.

At that time there ruled in England the king called Ethelred. He was a poor warden of the English against their foes, but made up for it at home as a tax-collector. It did not seem to the English that all the taxes he laid on them were equally needful, and like many another king he had to collect his due by force and harshness. When foreign oppressors attacked the country, it was his unfailing custom to buy himself off. Here was assured spoil for bands of foreign robbers. Ethelred loved his queen Emma above the rest of mankind, and at all times when he was not busy collecting taxes he sat in his castle carving birds out of bone, and between whiles gazing on the aforesaid woman.

It is more than can be done in these pages to record all the dealings between Thorkel the Tall and Ethelred ; but they had long been after the same style. Thorkel was never weary of sailing against Ethelred and bidding him battle. The vikings always landed on whatever part of the coast was then clearest, took hostages, and then called on Ethelred to ransom the hostages and pay a tribute, or fight it out. When a foreign host sent him their terms, he commonly fell into a grave sickness, with mighty vomitings and violent gushing of the bowels, and nothing could be got out of him but that

he was ready to buy peace with the tribute his enemies demanded. Such a tribute the English call danegeld or gaval.

Ethelred had given out huge sums in danegeld at this point of our story. It had come to this, that English peasants wearied of paying Ethelred their last farthing, and took to defending their own against him, or themselves raising a force to protect English towns and countryside from robbers seeking to lay their king under tribute. This King Ethelred called naughty and treasonable. He had less fear of an army of foreign raiders than of his own subjects, for he dreaded lest they should grow too strong for him, seize the government from his hands and turn him out of his throne and kingdom.

Now it befell once again, that Thorkel had summoned Ethelred to pay him a great heap of silver money, and landed an army on the banks of the river Thames to enforce his claim. Ethelred gave his wonted assent to all their demands, but had more trouble in acting on it. And when it seemed to the vikings that payment was long in coming, they raised an outcry that Ethelred had cheated them, and led their host against the king's capital and archbishopric of Canterbury. Thorkel had drawn a great force together from Ireland and Orkney and from the North. All in his army expected much gain from war with Ethelred now as ever. But when Ethelred heard of the army that was mustering, and its design on Canterbury, he vomited mightily as he was used, but thereafter summoned his own host. Yet he led it, not against Thorkel the Tall and his enemies the Northern vikings, but to war with his subjects, the peasants of Wales, in the hope of wringing Thorkel's peace tribute out of them. He himself took command of this war, said as was true that the Welsh were not zealous Christians, and meant therefore to have their property, choice silver, coined or uncoined, wrought or unwrought, and other good things, and kill every mother's child if they would not surrender it. Of Thorkel the Tall it is to be said, that he and his folk wearied of sitting idle waiting for Ethelred's tribute. They therefore set themselves to harry the country round and lift anything of price they

could lay hands on, as well as oxen and butter ; yet the spoil came short of their hopes. The peasants had been fleeced so often before that they had little left but their neckbones. And when Ethelred and the tribute still tarried, the vikings grew weary of robbing paupers and chose rather to fall on Canterbury. And since there were few in the place to defend it from an assault of two hundred twelve-oar ships, the vikings won the town without fighting, appropriated all the valuables in it, and burnt churches and cloisters as well as the king's castle to the ground. But the leading clerks, wellheads of true doctrine and patterns of godly life in England, they took as hostages. These were a great crowd, both monks and nuns. They seized bishop Godwin and the abbess Leafrune and many other excellent persons, besides the king's captain in the town, Earl Ælfweard, and many aldermen, and lastly they laid hands on none other than the illustrious archbishop Ælfheah, the greatest of all fathers of learning and friends of Christ that have ever been in England. He was then eighty.

It is told in English books that the Northmen then burnt every house in Canterbury to ashes and ill-used as many of the towns-folk as they could catch. Bodies rolled thick down the Thames, and in the city both water and earth were stained with blood, says the book ; women and youths they carried off to the ships and said this was their merchandise. But when at length Ethelred came home from war, with goods he had wrung from the Welsh while the castle was burning and the cloisters being laid waste, Thorkel demanded double the tribute and a ransom for each one of the hostages. Ethelred could not find such an addition to the sums that had been agreed on, and begged Thorkel's favour ; but he said they had taken ship to raise wealth and not for pastime ; it was his indispensable duty to his folk not to forbear plundering while there was hope of anything to be found ; he said that true fighting-men and those that meant to be rich had done so from Arild's time, and never heeded the whining of such as were too weak to defend their own. And as Ethelred had already beggared the English, he was at a loss where to turn and spewed mightily. And as before,

Thorkel grew weary of waiting ; he proclaimed an assembly to be held outside the town at daybreak on Palm Sunday, and said the hostages were to be brought there from their dungeons. All and sundry should be welcome and the king might send representatives. Thorkel now summoned those of his men who were deftest in the use of awls, pincers, knives and small axes. The chief torturer was a youth from Vestfold in Norway. This young man was pale of face, short-legged, but hugely fat and so large in the rump that his gait was a waddle. He was named Olaf Haraldsson, and the vikings called him the Stout. This young man had small hands and wore rings on every finger, on some two or three, and had two silver belts round his waist, one above the other. But his figure was such that the belts gaped, and were secured with twine through the buckles.

Now the hostages were brought out. They were a great multitude, both men and women, most in the garb of religion. Olaf Haraldsson said each was to be tormented for what he was like to yield in silver or butter, and in a progression according to rank and estate, so that they tormented first and sparingly those of whom little wealth or butter could be expected, such as lay brothers and poor nuns, together with common clerks. Then followed choir brothers and canons, and then abbesses, and at last abbots and bishops, together with earls and aldermen and their ladies. They were not all maimed alike ; some lost hands and feet, others had nose or ears cut off. Not a few had their eyes pricked out. Many times that day King Ethelred was summoned to pay ransom, but he invariably replied that all the coffers in England were empty and so were the butter-sheds. That day they lopped, sliced or gouged Ælfweard, the king's captain, and other English magnates, together with bishop Godwin and abess Lcofrune and a great company of religious doctors. When the hostages had been tormented, they were removed and sent off to Ethelred. And from that day most that were of any mark in England lacked nose and ears.

Last of all Ælfheah, the archbishop of Canterbury was brought out. He was then very tottery, and blind. At his

right hand walked a pale youth, venting his soul's ecstasy in God with shrill chanting of Psalterium. Thorkel the Tall said:

'There seems little reason to prick out the eyes of a blind and white ancient like this, and there we hope Ethelred can agree with us. Go and tell the king that he shall have this man back unharmed, but not till we have been paid eighty hundred silver pieces in ransom.'

Then the man came forward who was King Ethelred's mouthpiece. He bowed to Thorkel the Tall and said:

'That venerable master of learning, standing yonder in chains, is not only King Ethelred's spiritual father and counsellor, but also brother and friend to the apostle Peter in Rome, who speaks for Christ himself. For that man you shall have any ransom you ask. This we say in the name of the king and Holy Church.'

The words of this kingsman were received by the vikings with huge acclamation. All agreed that archbishop Ælfheah was truly a great man of God; it seemed the shouting and clapping would have no end; but when folk grew quiet again, they heard a man asking audience in a most weak voice, cracked and trembling. He asked King Ethelred's messenger to tarry and hear his words. It was the venerable Ælfheah himself speaking in his chains:

'Carry these words to my son King Ethelred and my brother Pope Sergius, that never shall any ransom be paid for me but what Christ paid on the cross, when he ransomed my soul from Hell. If I should now be ransomed for less, I could never again lift my head in this world or the next.'

And the vikings were grievously taken down, when they heard such an answer from the archbishop's mouth; but Thorkel the Tall said old Ælfheah was a man with heart in his breast.

'Now we will have done for this time,' said he. 'Take the old man back to his tower.'

Yet the Northmen felt no joy after their day's work, but had ale brought them in great casks and meat killed for boiling. They made fires and feasted on the banks of the

Thames. And as they drank, they began talking of how old Ælfheah must indeed be a son of Hel, since he meant to deprive true fighting men of eighty hundred silver pieces for his pride's sake. They called it a great shame that cowardly monks should think to find refuge in the dead, crucified Christ and waste decent folk's livelihood. And the more they considered this, the more vexed they grew. In the end most agreed that they would not put up with any further annoyance from the Christians nor miss their share of the ransom money. And when they had eaten and drunk much, and the revelry was at its height, many good men raised their voices above the others and said it was an ill deed to spare the old fool who had this day bidden them defiance. The chiefs ordered archbishop Ælfheah to be brought out again, and this was done. The ancient was in a red bishop's stole and had had his beard made seemly. Young Grimkel kept by his side and sang. They led Ælfheah into the middle of the square and tore the stole from his back. Then the old man stood in his shirt, which was knotted of coarse tow with many knots. On his hands and feet were fetters. Now they began pelting the bishop with large ox-bones and bits of sheep's carcase, as well as ox-horns and what other missiles came handy. Then a voice rang out among them. It was Olaf Haraldsson the Stout, and he said:

'It is held for sure that there are more boy-loving men in viking bands than in other places. But where are they, if you have nothing to say when bones and shards miss the bishop and hit yon maidenly lad who stands there singing?'

At these words they roared with laughter, pulled the boy from the bishop's side and set him among them. Then the ancient was alone in the square in his fetters. At first he stood erect, looking upward, though he was blind, and muttering something no ear could catch. But when the ox-bones had struck him again and again, it says in English books, he sank to the earth, and then his body and limbs had been much pounded and his head smashed. So it was that Northern men did to death Alphegum archiepis-copum venerabilem on that day.

★ 23 ★

It is said that Olaf Haraldsson had two small ships in Thorkel Strutharaldsson's fleet, and that he had received these as a tooth-gift at home in Vestfold. Olaf had been seafaring from a child, had begun with the tasks assigned to young boys, and then risen to be a captain when he grew stouter. He had sailed his ships far and wide, and waged battle from Eastersalt to the land of Spain. Long afterwards he got skalds to praise his manly deeds in far countries. There was a story that he had conquered Gotland at twelve winters, settled there and subjected the islanders. And he was said to have fought with a prodigious array of knights in Friesland and gained the victory. To say truest, his rise had not been apparent to others till the day he joined Thorkel Strutharaldsson. Those vikings who sailed with few ships and a small band were finding it ever harder to be victorious on the coasts of our northern continent, for they were not strong enough to make raids where there was hope of plunder, since those parts were always defended. They had to be content with harrying where there were no trainbands, but this had the incommodity that in such places there was no spoil either, the boys were fleshless and the women worn out and not worth selling as thralls. All they could hope for was to lift a few cows or goats, when there were any, and salt them in kegs; they thought great things had been done if they got a living. Yet many in the ships were disabled by scanty fare, and many perished of scurvy. They were also short of good clothes.

But when Olaf the Stout and his company joined Thorkel the Tall, there began a time when his men could fill their bellies. Thorkel had also a law that every viking should keep

the possessions of any man he had felled ; but when they were sacking castles or churches, or emptying the coffers of town captains, it was the chiefs who divided the booty. If their spoil was copious, they shared out weapons and clothes among the men, and at last money.

When Canterbury was taken, most men from the viking fleet could be seen in the clothes of which they had robbed the towns-folk ; many a rude viking wore a monk's cowl, and some were in gorgeous chasubles hemmed with gold and had a crozier to lean on ; manslaughterers with bristling hair and matted beard had their polls hidden under bishops' mitres ; others had decked their heads with gold bands and such abbess-gear. There were also chiefs who strung gold rings on a cord and had them jingling at their belts, when they could get no more on their fingers.

Then came a day when Olaf the Stout was walking among his men, to see whether they were in good case and scan their weapons and clothes. In the band was one who did not seem as battered and tossed about as most of the rogues and vagabonds teeming there. This man had the look of a true warrior and his eyes were fierce ; but he was clad in a smock and meanly armed.

Olaf said : 'You have poor clothes, friend, nor do your arms look like victory. Choose what you would have of me.'

The man in the smock replied : 'I am no cadger, and I came hither not to receive alms but to win fame.'

'Then why did you not get yourself better clothes in Canterbury?' asked Olaf Haraldsson.

'For this cause,' said the man in the smock, 'that there we fought only such men as are likest women in helplessness, and whom we call papas ; there were also many women, and most with child ; sturdy men were at their work or with the army. There seemed to me little honour in tearing the clothes off monks and nuns or pregnant women and creeping into their things. I will rather wear my smock, that I took from goodman Gils Másson when I killed him at Horn-strands ; in that I came safe to Ireland.'

Olaf the Stout asked who the man was that spoke so boldly. Such a man could not be basely descended.

‘Thorgeir is my name, son of Havar, and I am an Ice-lander,’ said he. ‘And since you would give me a cloak, you shall know what I have heard from my mother and my oath-brother Thormod Coalbrowsskald, that the only gifts fit for a true warrior are those a king bestows on his merit when the battle is ended. I will fight in this my poor smock, till with weapons I have deserved the cloak a brisk man can wear with honour ; but if I should fall pierced by weapons, then it is right that I should have no bigger or better coat than this. Next time we fight I hope we shall meet such champions as my mother told me are found in battles. Then it will appear who I am, in spite of these my bad clothes.’

Olaf the Stout then said : ‘You are strange men in Iceland, who will not submit to a king, but rely only on yourselves, which is without parallel in the World. But to what king would you do homage if you had the choice?’

Thorgeir Havarsson said : ‘I have such faith in you that I will do your bidding only.’

‘That is spoken like a true man,’ said Olaf. ‘None has ever addressed me so before. You will surely be a good kingsman. I pray you take from me this gold ring, as a sign that I expect greater things of you than of other men.’

Now that the Northmen had accomplished the manly feat of laying Canterbury waste, they were filled with their own greatness and thought all roads open to them in England. They held weighty councils by the Thames. Then it became the talk of their leaders that the time was ripe to think more of London than they had done yet. That city was wealthier and more populous than others in England, and the only English town that had never been stormed by a foreign army. The vikings had heard that in that town more wealth was assembled than in any other ; there dwelt many a good alderman and English lord, besides rich merchants that had ships trading with foreign parts. There were also many ingenious craftsmen of whom divers commodities could be had, weavers,

tanners, goldsmiths and other skilled men. The Northmen also thought it desirable to plunder the townsfolk of valuables, weapons and ready money, besides furniture and goods and other objects for use or profit. Thorkel now gave out that all in the host were to sharpen and clean their weapons, make their ships ready for battle and sail up-river ; he meant to fall on London, and promised each man whatever booty he could lay hold of, yet no more than he could carry himself ; but all that was carried on pack-horses or driven in carts should be the undivided property of the host, and King Thorkel have the disposal of it, which was viking law.

Now they sailed the fleet up-river with warlike din, blowing horns, yelling and swinging rattles. From inland King Ethelred's power marched to hold them up ; but it had no ardour nor steadiness, nor faith in the leaders' will to oppose the Northmen ; and indeed thenadays there was no fleet in our continent that could fight Northern sea-kings ; moreover English books say that there was dissension and faction among the English, and King Ethelred's captains had enough work elbowing each other out. Some meant to be king's friends, others to play him false ; and English clerks make no doubt that many good men in the king's army had been bribed by the Northmen ; but some forsook their lord gratis and of their own motion in the hope of prospering by it, and the army went to pieces.

Of King Ethelred it is to be said, that when he learnt how the viking fleet was making for London he fell into such vomitings as have never been known, and took to his bed in a retired lodging. Now all Ethelred's men were either killed or taken, except such as fled up-country and found shelter in woods or cottages. The vikings sailed on, moored their ships close together below London Bridge in the evening, and made ready to storm the town walls at daybreak. There was no army in the town, and none to defend it but the common townsfolk. And when the Londoners were aware of an overwhelming force approaching their town, every man prepared himself to defend home and household, each with whatever weapon, tool or other implement came to hand. There were

but few weapons such as belong to war, and indeed there were few men of fighting quality in the town ; most able-bodied men were at work in their lords' fields or in Ethelred's army or had taken service with other kings, or they were out on trading voyages ; but most of those in the town were old men and children or young lads, besides a host of women and cripples ; there were also many lepers and other wretches in the town, besides whoremongers with slit noses and thieves with severed hands. And when the attack sounded, and the vikings, shouting, yelling and brandishing their weapons, stormed up on the bridges and hoisted ladders against the city wall, they encountered these folk, each using what he had ; some fought with brooms, others with pokers, some with spades or pitchforks, many with clubs and sledgehammers ; old folk and bedesmen as well as maimed thieves fought with their crutches, and children with playthings. The Londoners hailed stones on the vikings, stately dames and poor women, some pregnant, others with infants on their backs, rushed at them, inviolate maids and common trulls stood side by side and poured boiling urine over them, while others hurled seething pitch at them or drenched them with water from the river. Firebrands were tossed into the ships, so that fire broke out on all sides and spread from ship to ship. It was not long till the whole fleet was ablaze, and many of the viking ships sank. The townsfolk also got all the loose bridges broken off and the ladders by which the vikings thought to enter the city. But every viking that came over the wall was encircled and overborne by the crowd and flailed with many base weapons, or attacked with sheath-knives and table-knives, files and awls, pins and needles and pincers, or bitten to death by townsmen and torn to pieces alive and thrown to the dogs.

But when the tale had got thus far and King Ethelred learnt these tidings, English books say he was so afear'd that the vomit stuck in his throat like an avalanche in a narrow gully, for slight is the fear awakened in rulers by foreign ruffians to that they cherish for their own subjects. And when he learnt that the Londoners were indefatigably burning and

sinking the Northmen's fleet and seething the vikings in piss and carving them up with kitchen-knives, he thought it hard that the teaching of wise old English kings, that Northmen are invincible, should be confuted in one morning by a silly commonalty, unarmed and ignorant of war, while the English fighting men had fled to the woods or hidden themselves in mangers. Ethelred then rose from his bed and ailed nothing. He sent an express to Thorkel Strutharaldsson the Tall, offering to meet him and treat with the vikings. And they left the city forthwith and rowed down-river in the ships that were not burnt or sunk. They appointed to meet King Ethelred at the river-mouth. There was made an agreement that has become famous in English books, and King Ethelred promised the vikings four hundred and eighty hundreds of silver pieces in tribute. But since he was without means, he offered to open to them all doors in London town, and they should be named the city guard; he promised to give out that they were to be honoured above all in the land and no masters were to be more hotly loved, and to them before any other authority in England should revert all the gain and good things of the city. And since Thorkel and most of his men were by nature landless folk, they were pleased to waive lands and rule, and content themselves with the lifting of naturalia or ready money. And in return for King Ethelred's offer they promised that they would assuredly be his guard against his own subjects, who were so intemperate in their zeal as to brave renowned captains and noble conquerors with ladles and kitchen-knives, brooms and crutches, or pour piss over famous men.

It has been said that King Ethelred had a queen named Emma. She was the fairest of princesses. Queen Emma was Norman in blood and sister to a great chief, of whom we now have something to tell, Richard Duke of Normandy. Sister and brother were descended from Ganger-Rolf on the father's side. Richard Duke of Normandy had come into sore straits at this point of our story. Only a small part shall be told in this book, but most clerks record of him with one voice that he was a most discreet ruler.

In the pact between the dukes of Normandy and the kings of France, it was granted the dukes to have a numerous and well-armed power always on foot, yet not to defend Rouen, but to back the Frankish king when he made war on other kings. The Duke drew his men's pay in silver, which was a great resource to him. Thus Richard could have few fighting men in his castle, and he was not strong enough to collect taxes and assert other claims at home with such constraint of the populace as was needful, for which cause the peasants banded together against Richard, and held things with spokesmen from many regions behind the Duke's back, and took counsel how to benefit their own order. In those lands, counties and dukedoms that were neighbours to Richard sat other folk who bore him illwill, and the kings therefore went about to vex him with wrongs and encroachments, each to his power. He that snatched, got. Here is to be cited one such ruler by the name of Odo, and he was lord of Chartres.

Of this king, Richard Duke of Normandy made the following complaints: Odo had taken to wife Duke Richard's sister, Maud by name, who brought him in dowry that wide and

rich lodrship that in the French tongue is named Dreux. When he had lived with Maud for a time, he grew sick of his wife and fonder of most other women. He sent Queen Maud to a nunnery and got one of the holy sisters to poison her. But though Odo had put her away and taken other women, he would not restore to his brother-in-law the Duke of Normandy either the castle of Dreux or the lands appertaining. Richard now required him to give them up, and the wrangle went on till they were both weary of it. Then it came to an open breach, and they made war on each other. Richard dispatched men to fire the country of Chartres, and Odo men to ravage Normandy. Yet it was never fought out, and chiefly because most in the kings' armies contracted affinity in these wars, if they were not near akin or intermarried already; folk settled here or there in those lands as though they were one, though the kings called them two. And while the kings, swollen with wrath, proclaimed war between the lands and announced blows, slaughters and judgments out of their great love to Christ, and heroes bit their shields, the country folk were summoning to carousals, beddings and christenings. And all this made it uneasy for the Duke of Normandy to obtain his rights from his undesired good-brother Odo of Chartres.

Now the story shifts to King Thorkel the Tall and his vikings. They tarried in London as King Ethelred's cherished guests, getting from all men what they would, emptying the city coffers and carrying to the ships all that was worth anything. But when they had drunk up the last of the townsfolk's ale, and eaten all their meat, and made away with most Londoners they took a grudge at, and lain gratis with the women they fancied, and there were no more famous deeds for true fighting men at this turn, and adventures were running out, then they began to think long. They demanded that Ethelred should send them where there were deeds to do. They said it became a weariness to sit over ale-mugs in London, they were bent on more renown, either to win gold and jewels or to go where silver coin could be bought

for goods and treasures and what else they had got out of London.

King Ethelred replied: 'Great is your noble mind, vikings, like your thirst for action, and truly it will bear hard on me to be without such defenders as you. Nothing is more certain than that I have never, from my mother's womb, enjoyed better health than since your coming to London. But now I suspect that God will no longer grant me your company and aid, and therefore I shall make known to you what bargain I have to offer at parting. My good-brother Richard Duke of Normandy has sent me word that he is in such distress as many good kings have to endure from their unfriends, native and foreign. To speak shortly, my good-brother Odo of Chartres sent his wife, that was my wife's sister Maud, away to an abbess and had her murdered, and now denies to give Richard back her dowry of Dreux. Since Richard has hired out his army to fight for King Robert in France, he has not the men to cool his griefs at home. He now offers great store of choice money, besides other good things, to any warrior-band that will give him the power to march on Odo and kill him and his rabble and spoil the country and burn Chartres.'

When the vikings had heard this message, they held councils and debated whether they should offer to enlist in the kings' war at Duke Richard's bidding and plea, and the more discreet among them thought such work as here presented itself would be to their great gain. They now sent an express to Duke Richard at Rouen, saying that King Thorkel the Tall was ready to stand by him with his men. With that the vikings took their departure and rowed down the Thames, and when they came out into the Channel there was a fair wind, and they hoisted sail and entered the mouth of the river Seine, and went on till they came to Rouen castle, where they dropped anchor and sent word to the Duke that King Thorkel Strutharaldsson was here with his underkings and picked men at King Richard's request.

Those in the castle did not fall over themselves to receive the band, but towards evening the Duke's legates brought

Thorkel word that the robbers were to take a bath, comb the lice from their heads, rub lye in their hair and wash it, and then come before Duke Richard.

There were many great folk in the fleet who called this an opprobrious message. Sea-kings had always thought it more lordly to wear rich cloaks and abundance of heavy and precious trinkets than to rub themselves with lye and pour water on themselves like women and cowards. But yet the vikings dared not do other than observe these conditions. They knew besides that Duke Richard had at his court many noble barons, French and southern, and that in his castle all courtesy was used, and that those men were the greatest butts who knew least of good manners.

But when Thorkel and his men entered the castle, they were taken to the king's halls. Here was Duke Richard with his counsellors and bishops and other magnates. King Thorkel and his men were not smooth of face and were little practised in walking on stone floors, and their fine garments were somewhat crushed; but they wore good, richly decorated swords and many other rich ornaments, and the shields they were carrying had gold rims. Duke Richard did not let them get far into his hall, but rose from his throne and went to meet them with his marshals and bishops. He was low of stature, slight and mincing in his gait, and as he advanced towards them across the floor he had one hand on his sword-hilt and unceasingly crossed himself with the other. He seemed to be breaking through a multi-fold spider's-web. Duke Richard did not bow to the newcomers nor they to him. He bade them welcome in the French tongue, called his interpreter and, as he stood near the door, addressed this speech to them:

'You, my lord Thorkel and other chiefs, I will do to wit that with Christ's guidance we are preparing manifold war on such men in and beyond the realm as have shown themselves enemies to me and God and Holy Church and now deny us our right. In this I would have your aid, and offer you pay in advance and a share in the booty when the work is done. We consider it our most pressing task to fall

on Count Odo, who calls himself king of Chartres. Odo of Chartres is an unrighteous king, who has broken the law of Holy Church by lying with those women that Christ son of Mary does not intend for him, and killing those that Christ would have him espouse. Such a king should pay forfeit with his neckbone. I would have you march with me to kill this whoremonger and lay waste his land, for our love to Christ and the righteousness that the blessed John the Baptist and the high priest Melchisedech would have in the world, as well as God's darling daughters Sunniva and Belinda, who rule over chastity. But it may not be concealed that in such a glorious task we will have no fellows but such as have received baptism and the Holy Ghost in water and word. It is open to you to be baptised forthwith and wash off the evil one. But those that refuse baptism, they are unfriends to Christ and ourselves and the Lord Pope and all holy men and women and the landgraves and kings and archangels and thrones that bear lawful sway in Heaven and Earth. Our bishops, here standing by, have therefore promised indulgence in Purgatory to every man who by divine inspiration is willing to pull down so cruel, impenitent and hardened a rogue as Odo of Chartres.'

When King Thorkel Strutharaldsson and his men got back to their ships, he summoned those chiefs that had command in the fleet and said that here the vikings had a tasty dish set before them, chests full of gold, and promise of immeasurable war booty, when they had gained the victory over an evil and worthless king who ruled up-country. Yet there was a bone in the dish that some, said Thorkel, were like to startle at. It was the Duke's will that they should either receive baptism or abjure fighting under his standards.

At these tidings there were voices raised for and against among the chiefs. Many in the band had certainly been baptised in the past or taken primesigning for the sake of commerce with Christians, though few troubled about a right understanding of the faith. But yet more of them were entirely heathen, and some thought it a killing matter if a man truly addicted himself to Christianity. Some stood

forth and said that never should Northern vikings bend the neck to Christians or obey their commands. It would be more to the point to set Rouen on fire and kill the Duke and the bishops.

King Thorkel then addressed them a second time. He asked them not to forget that in Rouen there were men of mark, able to avenge themselves; this was not like hewing down cattle and helpless clowns in little places on the coast of Friesland or Jutland, or in Samland or north in Karelia. Richard had both a well-armed following to defend his castle and the protection of mighty kings in the south. He thought it would be more sensible to collect their pay with little danger from such a petty count as Odo of Chartres than to give battle to mighty kings about which gods were most trustworthy. And indeed many had found by experience in England and elsewhere that Christ's friends were by no means less doughty than Thor's.

'Nor is it a secret in the army,' said Thorkel, 'that of late I have had at my side a young Englishman whom we call Grimkel. At one time he served Ælfheah, whom you did to death on the banks of the Thames. This young man is both skilled in dreams and a seer, and because of his gift he knows many secret things in and upon the Earth, as well as those that are done above in the seat of Odin; and further he can relate the news from Niflheim. This young man is a near friend to the Emperor Christ himself. I hold it certain that Christ has sworn a great oath to avenge on us the wickednesses with which we ill-used his friends and kin, and has made a vow that the terror of his vengeance shall be unmatched in the World, unless we oblige him in some things that are of moment to him. Or do you smell a stink from Whitechrist,' said Thorkel, 'to refuse good money and gain his enmity instead of getting him as our friend?'

And by these wise words from Thorkel's mouth the chiefs' grumbling was subdued, and when they parted there were fewer than before that had a mind to reject the offer, though it were not unconditional. Now each chief went to the men

he had under him, to explain what promise of wealth there was for them in baptism and Holy Ghost.

★ 25 ★

It is said that among those that held council on Thorkel the Tall's ship to debate the vikings' Christian baptism was also young Olaf the Stout of Vestfold, who ruled two ships in the fleet, his tooth-gift. He was then eighteen winters old. He moored his vessels alongside other ships on the Seine at Rouen castle. And when Olaf had come aboard that night, he had the crews roused from sleep and called a meeting. He expressed himself as those do who are in the habit of talking for many ears, and it was commonly thought that what he lacked as a fighting-man and in other manly parts he made up in eloquence and insinuating address.

He began his speech with the words that at this moment Northern vikings had the prospect of such a foray as had been unknown since Harald Comelyhair's day, when the Northmen's luck was so great and their glory at such a height that foreign kings jostled to make over their lands to them, and offer them their daughters to wife, as when the Frankish king Charles gave Normandy to Ganger-Rolf along with his daughter Popa.

'And now Rolf's descendant in Rouen, Duke Richard, has heard what praise you have won in England by your noble hearts and fighting spirit, and the invincibility at which all the World trembles. Out of fear he would now throw open his lands to you, and give you leave to harry French kings and crush them at pleasure, and of the land's wealth have what you choose, princesses and queens and other high-born dames gratis as desired. But that you may give your-

selves up unblamed to all the sport that lies in victorious war, with slaughter, fire-raising, plundering and rape, Richard asks only this trifle in return, that you should receive baptism and the Holy Ghost and become Christians.'

Olaf now told how he had sat in council with other chiefs that had commands in the fleet.

'There,' he said, 'the men that can boast more ships than I raised their voices; and all seemed to be of one mind, both those that count for much, and the others that have few and small ships.'

Then Olaf the Stout went on with his speech to the shipmen and said:

'In few words, I think myself better versed in Christianity than other men in the fleet, for this reason, that I have cut off the noses and ears, cut out the tongues and also pricked out the eyes of more churchmen and nuns than other Northmen, which was entrusted to me because I am thought to have good leech's hands. It has never yet appeared to me that any Christian lost courage though he were mutilated; far more were those that smiled as they were ill-used. It strikes me that the world will sooner perish in Ragnarok than such men be conquered. I will here disclose to all, that not for one day have I forgotten the manhood shown by that English archbishop Ælfheah, when we dispatched him with bones and horns for our pastime. Since we stoned that clerk, it has always seemed to me that our weapons and ships were not as good as before; and yet we have broader axes than other nations, and seaworthier warships than any king in the World can match. Now I am certainly not as shrewd a man as our leader King Thorkel Strutharaldsson, yet I know equally well that insight into hidden things, as well as the use of books, song, courtesy and noble sword-play, and therewith the esteem of southern magnates, are in Christ's gift and not Odin's, though to be sure this latter knows the language of birds and has talked with Mimir's head. Further I think it is time to be done with that widespread lie, that Christ son of Mary does not come up to Thor in fierceness and cruelty or to Odin in guile. For why

has not Thor laid the World under his hammer, if the gallows-tree of the son of Mary were not a harder flail, that my kinsman Olaf Tryggvason flashed over Norway? I have an inkling that never again will a Northern king prevail unless he gets those two at his back; and I hold also that my namesake is sitting at the high table with Christ in that glorious castle which is named the Galaxy and lies nearest the Kingdom of Heaven. I hope we shall not fall into the guilt of rejecting warfare that promises gold and silver, even though we are to fight for holy spiritual teachings that were far from our minds when we left home scant of learning and knowledge, and though we are not yet perfect in such questions as what woman Christ would have Odo of Chartres to lie with. But it seems to me more profitable to work Christ's vengeance on Odo for the mischief ~~done~~ his lawful spouse, and thus ransom ourselves from the snake-pit Christ has in store for his enemies, than without Christian instruction, courtesy or piety hew down men and salt oxen on beggarly seacoasts of our nothern continent.'

The baptism of the viking host is numbered in the annals of Rouen with the chief of its events, not least for sundry tidings that came of it; but only a small part shall be told in the little book that has here been formed.

When the conversion of the vikings was known in castle and town, and news of it spread round the country, then the dukedom of Normandy praised the Lord. And on the appointed day, when the great ceremony was to be held, crowds and armies of men hastened into the town from all sides, to be at hand when a troop of evildoers, the most abominable that were known among men, humbled themselves and entered the pay of Christ. And early on the morning of that day the cathedral was thronged with folk, and none that lagged could get in. And because of this teeming crowd the clerks so ordered it, that no vikings were to be led to baptism inside the church but those with authority and the rank of chief; all others were to be baptised in the church square under open sky. Now water was carried out in tubs and blessed with song; and by these

songs the water was made of other kind, it had now the virtue and nature of the waters of Jordan, in which holy books say that Whitechrist himself was baptised. Cords were drawn round the holy place on the square, and within them the viking band was to be baptised, while the crowd was to stand without and see this work of Omnipotence.

That day clerks had enough to do in Rouen. There was ringing of all mass-bells and blowing on all pipes that were in the town, whereof came a fearful din, and men that had hitherto been impenitent were touched and softened. Next the monks sang laudes with great effusion of heart. But as soon as the office was at an end they began *Te deum*, and now the bishops came from the castle fully robed, leaning on their croziers, and before them went a tall cross. In the path of this company was burnt wood such as the kings of the East brought to Whitechrist, when he lay in the manger a day old, between oxen and asses; deacons and acolytes walked at the bishops' heels bearing their trains. Walking in the procession on God's behalf were also Duke Richard and his barons and other magnates in coloured clothes, and some wore gold and precious stones, others shining mail-coats and helms of red gold; golden, splendid swords might also be seen, and shields finely scrolled. Last, in white christening robes, the viking chiefs were led out to baptism, followed by the clerks who were to be god-fathers. There, swathed in white linen, was to be seen many a begrimed old Thor-lover with elflocks and matted beard, some hugely broad in the shoulders, hunched forward with chins thrust out and brows knit, drawing down their mouths and shooting out glances to all sides, as it says in the High Song: *Let him that opens a door, spy and be ware*; others were grinning little pot-bellies, shambling along with bandy legs and stiff necks, fair-haired and red-cheeked. But the crowd thronged upon them with tongues of praise and glittering tears, that such a fearsome rabble of thieves and firebrands should be clad in the mantle of light, ready to receive holy water and chrisma and confess their evil deeds,

to wit stealing cows and setting Europe on fire for seven generations.

Within the church there was assigned to each chief a guardian angel and saint besides his godfather, and each was named for his saint in water and chrisma; then they were summoned to the confessional. It was in the agreement with Duke Richard and the bishops that the vikings should confess their sins and crimes against God, though they had but a dim idea what sort of creature it was that the clerks called sin, or what god they had used ill, or how gods can be used ill; and indeed some articles of faith they professed rather in hope of spoil than after due study and consideration.

With the common vikings it was thus: they were drawn up in ranks on the square, and bidden to open their ~~heads~~ hearts to God; then clerks walked between them with tubs and splashed water on the ranks with sponges, and thus they were baptised in great swaths; some got but a little chrisma on their heads, and a whole row had to content themselves with one angel or saint, and there were many to share the name and guardianship of a heavenly being; the names of these good beings were mostly in Latin, so their christened names dwelt with them but ill, and many a man kept the one that had been given him as a child, when he was sprinkled in heathenry.

It is said that when the chiefs of the fleet were urging their men to receive baptism, in a manner all had the choice; they were free men striking a bargain with Duke Richard; but these words came after, that if a man were against baptism, it was open to him to take to the woods of Normandy as an outlaw and keep whatever spoil came his way, but under the standards of Duke Richard there could be no place for him.

It is not recorded that there were men in the band who chose rather to settle in the woods than take service with Christ king of Heaven and Duke Richard; but not a few were of opinion that they had already been baptised somewhere, though name and faith had slipped their minds for

a while ; and some could nowhere be found the morning they were to go to church. So it was that on Olaf Haraldsson's two ships they were a man short when the count was taken ; and the chiefs were puzzled who it could be, and none aboard missed his fellow. And since they were in great tumult of mind at what lay ahead, the truant was quickly forgotten.

Of Thorgier Havarsson it is to be said, that when he found the vikings meant to receive baptism and expected goods and honour from such a ploy, he called it foolery ; Christ was no dearer to him than of old, nor the Holy Ghost neither. And now the men were pulling their holiday clothes out of the lockers, those that had any, and all were merry over their choice of the better part, and declared that the heathen gods had never done folk much good. But in the bustle of that night, Thorgier crept along planks and gangways between the ships on the river, and got into a barge ; and the watchman did not see him as he jumped in. Thorgier now looked about for a hiding-place and found none that would serve but a tar-barrel standing in the hold empty ; so he resolved to lurk there and be out of Christ's way, and pulled down the lid over his head. There was more stench in the barrel than he had known the like of, and yet this seemed to him a shade better than baptism.

The vikings sailed their fleet up-country by the rivers but Duke Richard took the highway, riding with his barons and bishops and the armed retainers he had always about him like other kings. And when the vikings had entered the river Eure, which is on the border of Chartres county, they went ashore and set men to guard the ships. In that country the flat land opens out, but the church rises from a hill and shows far and wide over the plain. Here stands the city of Chartres, girt with walls and forts. But since Odo of Chartres and the Duke of Normandy had just been at war, and had had to give over when both got the worse, none in the city suspected harm. Then suddenly there was a prodigious foreign host at the gates, looking scantily winsome and with right untunable din; the warriors were blowing pipes, beating drums and whirling rattles; then they raised war-shouts, broke into the city forthwith and began to sack and burn, and wherever there was a human being, dog or other creature to be seen they fell on them.

It is told that Chartres church was at that time one of the largest north of the Alps, and the wisest clerks had long served it. This church had a high tower, and in it were many loft-rooms to shelter folk if they were in peril from siege or street-fighting. Each of the townsfolk brought with him the thing or things he held dearest of his possessions, silver and gold or precious stones. But when the church was full, its doorways were sealed with doors iron would not bite on. And when the vikings attacked the church, all these doors were in place. And now it was bruited about that Odo of Chartres had gone in there with his bishops and

doxies and other worshipful persons, and abundance of jewels.

At that day churches were less exquisite in their material and workmanship than later; men had not yet learnt to raise a great building with pillars and arches all of stone, but set beams in the walls to bind the stone and supported the vault and roof with rafters. And when the vikings had beleaguered the church a whole day and night and evening was coming on, they began to lose patience; and voices were raised in favour of burning the king and others in the church, as a discreeter course than waiting for what had more mischief in it than all other enemies, the common folk, to rise up in the town and take the besiegers in the rear. There were men in the band who had given thus much thought to Christian morals, that they said it would be a disastrous ploy to burn so splendid a temple to the ground. Christ would not be gracious to those who did so. But there were others among them, and these no less Christian, who called it a far worse crime for Count Odo to lie with the women Christ forbade him and neglect those he had been given with Christian sacrament. The law of Christ, they said, was more precious than an earthly house raised by mortals. And when the vikings had pondered this theology for a while and could not agree, King Thorkel said that as matters stood, they should seek a judgment from those who best knew the mind of Christ, to wit the bishops. And men were now sent to the bishops, to ask them whether this church should be spared, and with it the miscreant they were after, or whether Christ would have the church burn, and beggar and poke go the same way.

Great warlords have always been wont to sleep their sweetest during notable fights. Duke Richard of Normandy had accordingly gone to bed in one of the towers near the town gate, and with him his archbishop Robert, and they were brothers. They had forbidden any to wake them unless Odo were taken alive, for then they wished to be by when he was mutilated. Now they had an evil waking, when some of the vikings came to ask whether they should burn

Chartres church with relics and king and baronage and their possessions, besides common townsfolk, women and children.

The Duke got up and called learned men from another room and held council. But since they had few books in which to consult the holy texts and church fathers, Robert Bishop of Rouen, after strict invocation of the Holy Ghost and chanting of three paternosters, item Ave Maria whispered with sighs and tears, made his decision and dispatched it to his brother in Christ, Thorkel Strutharaldsson the Tall, in these words:

'Christ assuredly does not hold it commendable or proper to set fire to churches without cause, and with roasting of kings or simple folk of the land, women and children and other wretches. Yet it should be borne in mind, that though Christ be a great fisherman he is not caught in his own net, and he is too great a lawman to be ensnared in the laws he himself has laid down. Therefore he makes his law null and void when it would become a bulwark to the Arch Fiend whose seat is Hell, and who is so wise, cunning and guileful that he has often presumed to don the mantle of light, and adorn his head with the halo that belongs only to saints, and pick quarrels with learned men on the holy teaching and refute them in disputation. It is also foul heresy to believe that Christ has ever in carne or in spiritu pronounced these words, or the Holy Ghost in synodo made this law, that churches and relics, clerks, women and children and other helpless beings are without exception to be spared destruction by fire, come what may, as when emissaries of Satan cause good dukesmen loss of estate or cast off virtuous princesses, and thus ride the World with bombast and arrogance. And in this suit there shall be speedy judgment: when Satan himself goes to war, the words of kings and barons and lawmen and captains fall to the ground, with those of bishops and sheriffs and tax-gatherers and guards and all other kingsmen and men of God; and the ten commandments, that God traced with his finger for Moses on tablets of stone, shall be no barrier, and Christians for love of Christ shall assuredly burn children, women and other

wretches, wipe out beasts, birds and herbs, and send churches and relics up in flames, if by this means they can defeat the arch-enemy. *In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti.*'

And when Thorkel the Tall got this message, he bade them bring wood, hay and tar to Chartres church and set it alight.

It was an old custom among Northmen at war to collect in one place all the babies they found, undo their swaddlings and toss them on spear-points. The vikings had learnt of old that the more horribly they behaved themselves in foreign parts the less resistance they met with, and the more readily town and country were thrown open to them. It seemed a poor foray to Northmen if they had not made away with at least three dozen helpless folk for every stout man they killed, and it has ever since been thought proper for true warrior-bands with a regard for fame and prowess to observe the same ratio, when visiting other countries with war.

And when they had harried all day in the town and set fire to the church, they held a gaudy night, rolling barrels of red wine into the square and boiling kettles of meat. The mirth grew as the fire ate up the church timber. One diversion they had was the ballad known as *The famous war on London*, which the Icclander Thord Strutharaldssonsskald had made in Thorkel the Tall's praise, because he took London and gave eagle and wolf their fill.

The vikings had been roistering in the city that day to pass the time, and were decked out for the feast in all manner of gewgaws they had laid hands on. Some had a number of gold rings on each finger in the old viking way, and there were some in three scarlet cloaks, one above the other, or girt with two swords, though none in the band could wield this weapon. Some hung themselves about with enamel jugs and other drinking-vessels, wreaths of pearls, amber and coral, women's shoes brodered with silver, minever or dressed skins, or swathes of artfully woven gobelins; some hung at their belts the heads of the women they had ravished that day. It seemed to them that the whole world was dangling from half a calfskin and that the future was bathed in lovely light.

They were well pleased to hear their praises sung as they ate, and took up the refrain like thunder. They also let their tongues wag at the boards, and sought to outrival each other with vows of lordly deeds. Some vowed that hereafter they would fight for none but Christ, since he had given them holy teachings and revelations and sacraments to serve with weapons, instead of salting cows round all the coasts of the north only for a bellyful; vociferously they praised their new god for almighty works and wisdom, and especially for having brought them to such a rich noble seat as Chartres; and lastly there were those that vowed to marry the woman they had loved in childhood, in a dale or on an island or ness where they had grown up, and sell other women in England for tar, and then settle in Norway as yeomen, small kings or holy men.

The vikings called it wholesome for young children to die on the spears, when their mothers had been carried off or beheaded, their fathers killed and their homes burnt to ashes; such children were consecrated in death to the spear-king Odin. The man that was eldest in the band and fondest of children was always set to look after them, and was called the babyman; he had to see that the children lived till the champions were full. Then, when folk were ready to play, this man had to undo their swaddlings and throw them into the air one at a time naked. And a viking had to be ready with lifted spear and catch the child on its point. Next he had to toss the child three times on his spearpoint, and then throw it away dead; the Northmen commonly applauded this sport with bellows of mirth. Those that were new in the band were called out first, and then the others, that were handier at the game. And so it befell in Chartres on this evening, while the cathedral blazed, that Thorgeir Havarsson was called out to hold up his spear. The Icелander got sluggishly to his feet, still with the bone he was gnawing. He said:

‘When I joined your band, it was with the thought of coming among men and not to play myself. I do not think I am as much more of a coward than my true war-comrades, as I

am less fond than you of sports where heart and manhood leave off; I can see no need to fling these infants into the air. At home in Iceland my mother taught me that all jest and game are superfluous, and unworthy of good men. Nor do I recall that in the songs of my oath-brother Thormod Coalbrowsskald there was any praise of champions that had killed sucking infants with spears.'

A man said: 'Late can one give thanks enough for the aid of such glorious barons as Christ and Odin, and this is truly a modest sacrifice to what was offered in heathenry, when good men and kings were hanged on trees or burnt, for the crops and peace of nations. You must be a godless man.'

Another man said: 'It is my belief that no children are happier than those lifted on the spear, for they laugh with glee as they are tossed, till they are dead and in Heaven, where Christ our foster-father sits with his friend King Olaf Tryggvason. You must be stupid.'

And yet a third said: 'Most in the band are of opinion that you cannot rejoice women, Thorgeir Havarsson, and it is no wonder if such men likewise draw back from playing with children. You must be both wicked and craven.'

Thorgeir Havarsson answered these men and said: 'From the Earth I drew might and strength, and we will never give thought to trumpery, and will neither bow over women nor transfix children on the spear nor yet sacrifice to the gods, nor expect aid of man, woman or god, but only of the Earth. Nor will I destroy with weapons either dumb infants or others that lack manhood to defend their own. But if any in the band thinks himself my match, I defy him to holmgang. Babble I do not regard, but only weapons with their true tongues.'

But it was viking law that there should be peace between the men of a viking band on campaign, and he should be called *niding* that broke it. The chiefs said that Thorgeir's challenge to single combat was to be set off against the taunts given him, and let the case drop. They were here to rejoice at the death of Odo of Chartres, and none should spoil others'

mirth ; nor was any obliged to toss infants on the spear if he had no mind.

★ 27 ★

But at night when the flames of the cathedral rose highest over the plain of Chartres, and the feast was at full, they heard a tramp of horses and blare of horns out in the dark. It was a proud company of envoys with torches and waving banners ; these men asked where the Duke of Normandy had his lodging. And for the second time that night Duke Richard was awakened.

These men brought tidings from the king of the Franks, Robert Capet, that yesterday Count Odo had fled in secret from his city of Chartres, along with his bishops, doxies and other great folk, and taken refuge in a splendid stone building where he kept his treasure. From there he had made complaint to Robert Capet that Richard Duke of Normandy had overrun his domains with fire, murder and lechery, and that he had under him a foreign rabble in christening clothes, that had first been summarily baptised in Rouen. King Robert's envoys were to bid Richard take notice that Robert alone had the suzerainty over French lands, and that he alone bore name and title of king of the Franks by God's grace ; he would have underkings keep in mind that they lived under his rule and owed him their bread, and were such scum that they were only to be entitled dukes and counts. Further he sent word that the contention between Rouen and Chartres was to cease, and at this time there was to be no more fire-raising, murder, rape or other heroic deeds ; and none was to stretch out a hand in Chartres to lift the worth of a shoeclout, or touch a hair on the head of any creature, more than had been done ; the rabble from Norway calling

themselves vikings were to get packing. But his vassals Duke Richard and Count Odo he summoned to meet him in Paris, when things were quiet again and the vikings either dead or out of the country; he said he would then settle their differences and award each the realm he thought fit, but himself possess Dreux, the demesne they were fighting over, that Richard's sister had had in dower when she was given to Odo. Last came this warning, that west of the river King Robert had a redoubtable army with a great company of knights, besides all manner of engines, chariots, slings and Greek fire.

And when Duke Richard sent his stabularius in the night with the Frankish king's message to the vikings, Thorkel Strutharaldsson hastily took private counsel with certain good men of his band and then stepped forward and addressed Duke Richard's stabularius aloud, and was now wrath:

'We seem in evil plight, if in the heart of enemy land we must now face the redoubtable army of the Frankish king himself. Richard Duke of Normandy was decoying us into the grave when he proposed us this journey. Further it was treachery to keep hidden from us that Robert Capet is not his perfect friend, leading us to fall out with this overking, that is one of the mightiest and commands most men in the World. Thus Richard had bought us for sacrifice to Frankish swords and Greek fire, and decoyed us, that are on foot and far from our ships, into battle with iron-clad knights and those that have battle-chariots. When Richard moved us to come from England and fight for him, we thought to have the support of an army he had in readiness; but it seems the Duke has hired out his army to the Frankish king, and we are thus come into the strait of having to fight our lord's army; it is not forgotten, that Duke Richard called us robbers and ordered us to bathe and to kill our lice, though he himself has no following but the earth-lice that call themselves counts and barons and dare not come near a fray. To boot Duke Richard has traded the Christian faith on us, and it is strange that only we vikings, that were heathens yesterday, can be used to recover what Richard's sister gave Odo to lie with her. An ugly woman she must have been. This

Richard seems to us a little and craven prince. Tell him we should think it fair play to kill such a milkface and renounce the faith.'

Richard is held to have been a greater statesman than most dukes of Ganger-Rolf's line in Rouen. He now called together some of his bishops and counts that were in the house, and consulted with them. And they agreed that though Robert Capet had forbidden any and more warfare in Chartres county, there was still work enough for the vikings, namely to restore peace in Normandy itself, and kill the peasants and yeomen that would not submit to Duke Richard.

The Duke now rode out to the vikings with his following, greeted them warmly, and kissed all the chiefs that seemed worth taking into account. This time he used Northern tongue, addressing them smoothly and sweetly and calling them his kinsmen and brothers in every sentence, and Thorkel Strutharaldsson by no name but Sire. Now none were required to kill their lice or wash their heads before he would speak with them. Richard said:

'First I would thank you in words, Sire Thorkel and others our Northern brothers and brisk vikings, and later with gold and silver and great gifts, for the aid you have yielded us to reduce, though but in small measure, Odo of Chartres, that has been the greatest harlot-king here in the Frankish realm. Yet we will have done for this time, for Robert Capet, King of the French, our friend, and after Christ and the Pope our suzerain, would not have his underkings put to death, for fear that such doings may deprave the commons. Yet though by grievous mischance we were disappointed of Odo's life, but burnt Chartres church with most of those that sought refuge there, you shall not think this is an end to all the famous deeds I have purposed for you, nor that the hope of spoil is over, though it miscarried, great champions and all-conquering illustrious heroes as you are. I now purpose for you a work far greater and more gainful than those you have already accomplished. I have heard you thought the army somewhat too small that I had to join with yours when

you bound yourselves to visit Odo of Chartres. To say shortly, those fit men in Normandy that have not been taken by the King of the Franks are yeomen of little fealty; they hold Whitechrist cheap and worship Cabbage-Christ and Onion instead, and would rather work in the mould like worms or pat their gammers on the belly than increase their king's praise. They care little though mockers of the sacraments rob us of lands and wealth. They shrink from bearing our taxes, yet squander toil on ditching and fencing and building bridges and mending roads and many other beggarly tasks, instead of upholding my barons and their tenants. But if once in a long time they can be levied to make war on our enemies, they play me false and take wives in enemy land, and there set about worshipping their Cabbage-Christ and Onion from assiduous and lifelong habit, instead of fighting and dying for their king or bringing me home victory. Now the chiefs of this peasant army have summoned a thing behind our back, to consult how they may do best for themselves and worst for us. It is my errand to you, Sire Thorkel my brother, and all you my kinsmen, treading in the steps of my forefather Ganger-Rolf, that I would have you turn back across the river into Normandy with vengeance on those that have forsaken their lord and betrayed their country and have conspired against our dominion and kingly office, which was conferred on us Dukes of Normandy at the instigation of the Holy Ghost, by the Frankish king Carolus Simplex, the Pope and Christ son of Mary and the archangels, to hold under God the Almighty while the World stands.'

And when he had finished his speech, the wrath ran off King Thorkel Strutharaldsson, and the vikings were now more kindly disposed to Richard than a while back, and rejoiced that he had another glorious charge to offer them.

'Can any say,' they asked, 'that vikings are false to an open-handed king?'

They also declared their willingness to have bishops with them, ready to pronounce what Christ thought right and wrong in each case, as when they might burn churches, and shrive them if they burnt wrong.

The folk of Normandy had heard that their ruler Duke Richard was gone to Chartres with a viking army to dispatch Count Odo. And they had no thought of mischief, till the king fell on them with this same army and set about pacifying the land: beating or maiming the folk, burning the houses and hanging those whose fealty he suspected. At first the peasants made little defence. Here the vikings were in such luck that they were eating honey from a ladle. All that was to be found in the houses either of coined or uncoined silver or of tooth or bone they impounded and carried off. Small folk they tormented into betraying those that had been more active against the Duke. And when they camped of an evening, the first thing they did was to build gallows and hang the peasants they had taken that day. They were fond of halting near parish churches and cloisters, and ordered that bells should be rung, horns blown, and godly words read. The folk of Rouen, except the king's barons, held aloof while the executions were going on; the barons sat their horses in plate-armour with vizors shut, holding up their gold-mounted swords, and bishops and other cathedral clerks stood round the gallows in their vestments and sang. The lower clergy had plenty to do to shrive those who were laying down their lives; a silly rabble gathered to stare at the executions, see the barons and cathedral clerks in their pomp, and drink in the solemn language, chanting and other ceremony; there were also all manner of knaves, harlots and runagates and those eye-servants of the great that can be bought cheap in every parish to yell and jeer when folk are strung up for hanging: ready to clap any man that has stake and gallows at his command.

But when the peasants of Normandy had watched their houses being burnt to the ground for a time, they began to weary. The news sped from parish to parish that their duke had fallen on them with Northern vikings, Ganger-Rolf was risen again. Now they assembled in groups, travelling by night, but hiding by day in woods, reeds or haystacks; for weapons they had such bats as have always served peasants well, all manner of clubs and implements, most of wood, but some shod with iron. It is said in books on the art of war that never is a true fighting-man, wielding a sword or other such noble weapon, in more certain peril than when a peasant comes at him with a stake or tree-stump, and indeed cunning folk hold that Mjöltnir was made of wood; and vikings had learnt of old that though their weapons reached further and struck harder than swords, it was safer to avoid bands that fought with cudgels.

And one night, when darkness had fallen and a meal had been set for the ravens of the day's booty, elevated on gallows with shrift and oil, paternoster, ave maria, miserere and other holy chorales, and the barons were giving a feast, it befell that peasants came flocking in troops out of the wood; some had tools in their hands, spades and pitchforks, and others all kinds of bludgeons, piles and hedgestakes, mauls and flails, and now they began to thresh the vikings, and some to stick them. The vikings had had no word of this conflux and thought they saw a countless multitude rushing on them. There many a stout man from the North was felled and mashed by base weapons of a kind never exalted in song; but some had fishnets drawn over them, and when they were tangled and rolled up in the nets, women flung on them those liquid and boiling weapons that have warmed many a viking and renowned hero most in divers lands, and that are never named in books or in other narratives treating of great battles. There many a true fighting-man yielded up his life for little. Yet more took that counsel that has always served vikings best in a strait: not to tarry for worse. Each ran as fast as he could from spoil and booty, and let night and dark shroud him. In

like manner the barons of Normandy struck spurs to their horses and rode off, and with them went Duke Richard. Gone like dew in the sun were all that had come here for their sport, both vagabonds and loose women, while the bishops were gone to church to sing completorium.

But of Thorgeir Havarsson, it is to be said, that when the chiefs bade each man shift for himself, and most took heels to rump and were gone, he alone stood his ground calmly, in the Icelandic fashion. And when he had stood a while, he saw folk coming towards him with lighted lanterns; these folk shouted at him, and some said something in their foreign tongue, and he thought they were asking who he was, and why he did not run like the others. He shouted back and replied in the Danish tongue, that he had learnt at his mother's knee.

'I am an Icclander,' said he, "and I do not remember hearing in tales of old that true fighting-men ever fled in battle. We vikings have always made it our vow and war-cry, when we went into battle, that we would fight to the end and never desist, as long as one of us stood upright. Let others rule their own deeds; they shall not make me belie the words I learnt from my mother in childhood, and from my oath-brother Thormod Coalbrowsskald and other good skalds in the North.'

And when Thorgeir Havarsson had thus spoken, he raised his axe, meaning to hew at these men; but they contented themselves with waving cudgels and stakes and laughing at him and jeering. And the more he was seized with berserk rage, the merrier grew these peasants; a crowd forgathered, women and children, to play themselves; Thorgeir Havarsson thought he had fallen into a bad dream. But when he showed no sign of being quiet, they rushed on him and seized him and took away his weapons. They cut his spear and axe off at the shaft, threw aside the shafts and kept what iron there was in both weapons; but his short sword, that was dearer to him than other things, and all he had saved from shipwreck in Ireland, they took from him; a peasant laid it across his knee in the sheath and broke it

in two. And having done this, they let Thorgeir go, bade him be off home like a stray dog and snapped their fingers at him. Then they turned their lanterns from him and were gone.

He wandered about unknown country in the dark a great part of the night, weaponless and in sorry case, and strayed into a bog and fell in a pool. Then he found himself in a great patch of briers and fought long to escape; then he came into a thicket, with stinging-nettles under the trees and snakes winding through the grass; he knew not what was in store for him, for here was no thunder of women that fly like swans to choose fates for heroes. Then an adder coiled round his foot and bit him.

He roved about the woods a while longer. His foot began to ache, he felt queasy, and then vexed at such a fulfilment of what he learnt at his mother's knee; and at last all strength forsook him, and a cold sweat broke out; he lay down in a clearing of the forest. He thought it somewhat ludicrous to be lying on the ground bitten by an adder and not by weapons, and that wolves should have only what the worm left.

★ 29 ★

And that night went by like other nights, and day broke over the Norman forest. Thorgeir Havarsson was awakened by a large flock of sheep running over him, that a boy was driving with a long staff. And at that moment the boy was aware of a scrubby-looking man who got to his feet among the sheep, heartily cursing the clown that drove stupid beasts over him. The boy called it lunacy to lie down on a sheep-track, and desired the man in the path to take himself off. But as they could not understand

one another, the upshot was that they said What to each other for a time and then gave it up, and the boy drove his sheep to pasture. But on the way home he saw the champion bent forward, leaning against a tree trunk. Then the lad guessed that he was sick, and in the name of Christ son of Mary he had pity on an outland man, laid hold of a corner of his coat and made to draw him towards the nearest house. Thorgeir's foot was much swollen, and his whole body sore taken down with the bite, and he had a violent ague. The peasant boy had to hold the viking up. Then the sun rose over the forest. And when they had gone a little way down the path, before them was a low farmhouse under a tall tree, with the leaves swaying above the roof; smoke went up slowly and idly from a chimney in the morning quiet, and in the night-pasture cows wet with dew lay chewing the cud.

The boy now dragged the champion up to the house and opened; it had only one room, and in one corner lay a prodigious sow with her piglets, that were sucking her as she slept; in another corner a woman in a shift lay asleep with her baby, and had curdled milk simmering beside her over a low fire; thick lumps of butter lay on a shelf and noble cheeses, and between the rafters hung bunches of Cabbage-Christ and Onion and carcasses of fat sheep.

Now the herd-boy woke the goodwife, showed her the sick man he had found and gave him into her charge, and then went his way. The woman rubbed the sleep out of her eyes, rose from her bed and greeted the guest, bidding him come in and sit down. She took off his clothes and washed him, rubbed ointment proper for such a case on his swollen foot, tied it up and made a bed for the man. She brought him cheese, butter and wild cabbage, but he ate nothing. He said:

'Here the Northmen's fame is grown small.'

But such talk was beyond the woman; she got some clothes on and went out to milk the cows, asking Thorgeir Havarsson to mind her baby the while.

The same day, as Thorgeir Havarsson lay grievously ill,

guests came to the house ; they were neighbours seeking the goodwife. Between them they were carrying a dead body, which they delivered to the woman. It was her husband cut down from a gibbet and with the rope round his neck. Thorgeir thought he was one of those the kingsmen had accused of attending peasant councils, and thus of being false to Duke Richard. Yesterday the vikings had hanged him. The Norman woman was overcome with sorrow and burst into violent weeping, and from other farmsteads the women came to bear her company in her grief.

Thorgeir was so reduced by the snakebite that he could not stir ; he fell into burning fever and delirium, and had to lie and keep house with this woman and the dead body, her infant and her sow. And about the time the goodman was laid in his grave, Thorgeir's strength came back. There was a funeral feast in the house, the wife's good-brothers came, and her kinsmen and neighbours, and were served with cheese and meat, onions and wine. It appeared to the goodwife's sick guest that the gathering cast no friendly looks on him, and wrangling broke out between the widow and her kinsmen. Thorgeir saw that it concerned him, and that they were most likely talking of the fittest way to dispatch him. Some drew bright knives, voices grew loud, and the sow woke up and began to grunt. It struck Thorgeir that he had less mercy to expect from the male side of this kindred than from the distaff side. Some women that were kin to the widow approached his bed, lifted the quilt off him, examined his foot and then the rest of his body and discussed it among themselves ; but no hurt was done him at this time. The night was far spent, and the widow's lingering guests were gone ; and when she had shot the bolt at their heels, she came up to her guest's bed, sank down beside him and cried bitterly.

But the champion Thorgeir Havarsson had no skill in comforting women, and did nothing. She could feel that her guest understood the tears she shed no better than the words she addressed to him ; he was lying against the wall like a log of wood, with stiffened features, as of a man waking

up to find that a monstrous lion has climbed into the bed as he slept, ready to sink its claws in him and devour him if he so much as winks. And at last the woman resolved to dry her tears. Then she opened the door and went out into the night.

The goodwife was away some time, and the candle flapped weakly in the socket ; and when she came back, it was with a wretched, ragged old crone that spoke Northern tongue. The goodwife set her down by Thorgeir Havarsson's bed. The old woman first asked how he did, and then what was his name, and where he came from. He told her these things.

'You run great hazards, unhappy man, journeying so far over wild seas or forcing your way through briars and adder's nests in far countries, only to burn down the houses of some poor foreigners you know nothing of, or hang up farmers on their own land south in the World, along with other good men that have never come in your sight or done you harm. What are you aiming at, Thorgeir?

He said: 'I am a viking. We were hired by your lords to be their army in Normandy. But it shall not be concealed, that the battles have been much unlike those that are told of in the old songs I learnt from my mother and other excellent persons in Iceland.'

The old woman replied: 'Such songs are not worth a bean. It is the way of skalds to fight shiest of what is nearest the truth. But Christ has made all men peaceable, though lords and heroes are so eager to kill us.'

Thorgeir replied: 'I know not what kind of woman you are, old crone ; never will I grant that your Christ is wiser than our mother Thorelf or my oath-brother Thormod Coal-browsskald ; and I hope it will be long till we oath-brothers are decoyed into making peace with men.'

She said: 'I am an aged woman of Normandy and you a lad from the North, and yet maybe I could spare the time to tell you a story, you simpleton. You are not new to us in Normandy. You folk from the North have been visiting our coasts for ages, to destroy human life and steal

food; and though the country folk might rally against you and put you to rout, you always sprang up again, when your chiefs had collected another handful of thieves to plunder us. And when there seemed no hope that the plague of your visitations would ever cease, the end was that our foremothers took the business into their own hands. Instead of letting men from the North go on slaughtering our folk for ever more, many excellent women in this country set about getting the rabble into their beds and bearing them foreign sons; and those who did so were not only chaste country girls and damsels of noble birth, but also harlots and trulls, as well as widows of those the Northmen had killed. King Charles' daughter Popa herself went to bed with the outlawed pirate from Norway called Ganger-Rolf, who was so stupid and craven that he neither could nor dared ride a horse; by her he was made a man and his sons and daughters were made French.'

Thorgeir said: 'Why do the peasants of Normandy not band against us in warrior fashion, if they are men and French, and meet us in battle with Frankish swords, noble hearts and cruelty, and kill their King Richard, if they are weary of him? There would be more hardihood in that than in stealing on folk by night, to molest us with hedge-stakes, snare us in fishnets or scald us with slops and piss.'

'Trolls take your hardihood and warrior fashion,' said the old woman. 'Your murderings are praised by none but the fools you trail after you and call your skalds. Now, Thorgeir Havarsson, you shall have a choice; you may stay here and marry my grand-daughter, that is mistress here, since you have hanged her goodman; she saved your head tonight, when her kinsmen and good-brothers were resolved to kill you; you owe this woman your life many times over.'

Thorgeir Havarsson pondered a while, but said at last: 'To little purpose have good skalds sung of glorious kings, and bruited brave champions' renown until it can never die, if I must here soften and waste my strength in women's arms: It was not for this we parted from our oath-brother Thormod skald at the shoal. Thormod will not reckon me worth a

lay, if he learns I have died the straw-death as a peasant in Normandy among pigs and babies, worshipping Cabbage-Christ and Onion, though the woman be fair and estimable. He will see little cause to leave home and wife and set out to avenge me. And the World is grown too flat, if heroes are no more to be found but in women's arms.'

The ragged woman said: 'Now you have chosen as might be expected of you, and just as well. Now be off to a champion's proper work, to set folk's houses alight, and serve your sea-kings and lords by killing everything that draws breath, and thus rule the World.'

At these words Thorgeir rose from the bed and pulled his shoes on, though he was yet less than hale, and threw his coat round him.

There was little leave-taking between the great hero and the Norman woman. The goodwife flung a broom after him as he limped out of the door, but the old woman let fall that there assuredly went a leper who was one day to suffer an ignominious death, abhorred and far from the aid of man.

★ 30 ★

There was a king named Svend Blutoothsson. He ruled over Denmark. The Danes call him Twobeards in their books and the Iccalanders Forkbeard; in English books he has the nickname of Fathersbane; he had won renown above other kings by fighting against his father and killing him. Svend had received Christianity as a child from the German emperor, but he had renounced the faith, and was now for killing all Christians, clerks in special.

King Svend heard of England as a country where magnanimous kings might reap great fame, gathered a noble fleet in Denmark, sailed it to England and set about harrying the land.

The Danes came to the east coast and landed part of their men, but kept another part on the ships. Svend Bluetoothsson was in many ways a king of another sort than Thorkel Strutharaldsson. Because Thorkel was a sea-king whose life had been spent on shipboard, he was more for robbery than conquest. It was far from his thought to settle in a strange land, though it were open to him ; and therefore he despoiled the English King Ethelred of all that could be turned into money, but never settled down in his kingdom. Svend, however, found it more natural to conquer a land than plunder it, therefore his men were indefatigable in taking towns and counties ; in every place they began at once to set all in order, and behead or maim chiefs or clerks, but they let folk's property alone. Many Englishmen came to meet King Svend and offer him fealty, saying they would sooner be ruled by a foreign, heathen parricide and sworn foe to Christians than by a native and pious king who in peace carved bone and in war threw up, and had never taken the field but against his subjects.

Of King Ethelred it is to be said, that he did not belie his custom of open-handedness to foreign enemies, and just as King Thorkel had been given all the coined silver he would, besides other property, so this king that had now come ashore got his will in most things. King Ethelred began with great spewings, as he was wont, and took to his bed, while Svend added town after town to his dominion ; but when Ethelred got his speech back he sent to ask King Svend what he would have, and all should be open to him : but Svend sent back word that he demanded the throne of England.

King Ethelred had delivered all his wealth to King Thorkel, and now he gave up his realm to King Svend, so that he had nothing left but Queen Emma and seven birds of bone. Some compassionate fishermen took him on their boat and carried him and his queen to Rouen town, and here he had speech with his brother-in-law Duke Richard and begged his aid.

The vikings had suspended their foraying for a time and

were leading a pleasant life in Normandy, some in castles, others in ships ; they were Duke Richard's army and got from the townsfolk what they would, as at all times when they had been henchmen to kings. They often gathered to drink of an evening, and told one another tales of their manly deeds, and dauntless bearing in battles far about the World, as also of perils at sea, and finally of the honour shown them by kings and high-born damsels. They also frequented the churches on the numerous holidays and feast days observed by clerks ; in Frankish books it is written that all the trulls of the town thronged there for custom, especially at the great feasts ; the vulgar also found pastime in the sight of gorgeous countesses or bishops' doxies, as well as reverend abbesses, parading in scarlet cloaks edged with gold down to the hem, and wimples adorned with precious stones.

Now Duke Richard sought speech with the vikings, and desired them to aid his brother-in-law by sailing to England and driving King Svend Blutoothsson out of the country ; he promised them rich spoil if they could subject the English to Ethelred again. At this some drew their brows down over their noses, and said the brothels were far better in Rouen than in England, the wine sweeter, the fairs more frequent and bustling, the chanting brisker ; the climate was so good that grass grew in wintertime, and cows gave their summer milk. But others in the band were for daring glorious deeds in the ancient way, rather than addicting themselves to womanish pastime and fat pasture ; they said the vikings had gone downhill, if they were rejecting fame to hang over trulls, gape at monks bellowing evensong or admire winter graznig. But all with one voice agreed that they could expect little glory in the service of such a miserable king as Ethelred ; they called it a blunder that Thorkel the Tall had failed to make himself king of England while he had the chance ; they took it that Svend Twobcards was a grim king, since he had not stuck to kill his father.

And while they were thinking over the voyage to England, time went by, till there came to Normandy news that

rejoiced many, that Svend Twobeards was dead, and sickness had been his bane; the Danes had sailed away, and England was a kingless land. And at this news the vikings yielded a heartier consent to back King Ethelred; they now rigged their ships and prepared for the voyage.

It has been set down before, that the day folk were mishandled in Canterbury and Ælfheah was stoned to death, there was at the archbishop's side a youth gazing heavenward, fair of face and with beauteous eyes; and he that was directing the mutilations, Olaf Haraldsson the Stout, pronounced this boy too maidenly to die and would have him saved. And when Ælfheah had been struck dead, the vikings went up to cast their eyes on this youth, who had stood beside the holy man and sung as he was tormented. All thought the boy winsome, and several would have had him to wife. But when King Thorkel heard their gibes, he said none was to be so hardy as to shame the lad.

'He shall wait on me, and I will be his guardian,' said Thorkel.

King Thorkel always had the boy at his side, and sharing his lodging. The vikings were posed by his Latin name, which he had received in holy baptism, and they called him Grimkel. Thorkel put great faith in the lad and consulted with him on many things.

When Thorkel had become a Christian, he grew yet more attached to his foster-son Grimkel, and plied him with questions on such things as he had formerly thought of little moment, mostly the Holy Christian Church, and who bore lawful sway there and with what weapons. The viking made out that the bishop of Rome was above all, and after him came the lesser bishops, and that they used witchcraft and Latin spells and other black arts, from which Odin and the old Northern gods had no defence, and that they had also the power to excommunicate enemies and make and depose kings; and that the heavenly builder Christ had given this power to his bishops while he walked the Earth, before he was tormented. The viking thought it material to learn of Christ and his envoy where lay the boundary between

truth and untruth. Till the day they became Christians, the vikings had never heard but that those acts were right and those words true which could be made to prevail by weapons or gifts, and that no other basis for words or acts was worth anything; but now they found in the precepts of holy men this new teaching, that some acts were right and others wrong, not after their nature, but according to divine wisdom. King Thorkel thought it a great stumbling-block that only bishops could interpret the will of Christ in such clauses and articles as are of most concern to war-lords, as how to bear themselves in battle with Christian men, and what is required to allow of sackless folk and other wretches being burnt alive, as well as when Christ esteems it right and proper to set fire to churches.

On these grounds King Thorkel declared himself minded to have a bishop at his side to interpret the ordinance of Christ in great matters, as murder, tortures, desecration of churches and hewing down the weak. But archbishop Robert made light of the need to ordain a bishop for King Thorkel, and said it was Christ's will that bishops should have their seats on land and sing in cathedrals and not roam the seas.

In the town were some wandering Armenians, who maintained that they were the lawful heirs of the apostles and had been driven from their native land by the Seljuks, a nation following the prophet Mohammed. The Armenians profess neither the Christianity of Byzantium nor the Roman, but the Gregorian. In a tavern of Rouen the vikings now met an Armenian archbishop; they sought to hire him to ordain Grimkel bishop, but the hedge-bishop was reluctant. They offered him first ale and wine, and then silver. But when at last they had shown him fiery-red gold and the archbishop found it had the true ring, he sent for his mates, other hedge-clerks that were in the town. All the clerks held out long, calling it the height of frenzy that Christ should open his mysteries to thieves and riffraff from the World's end up in the North. But as they continued to drink at the Northmen's charge, and had always the ring of rare Frankish metal in their ears as they drank, the end of it was

that in their great need of coin they took the matter more lightly, and finished by giving way.

All churches were shut to heretics, and it was unlawful to shelter any of their holy rites. And so Grimkel was ordained bishop in a market-place in the midst of horses, Cabbage-Christ and Onion, together with pigs for slaughter and other good things the peasants had brought to market. The blessing was brief and the chant sluggish, and the vikings stood guard round the ceremony against boys and dogs that the town clergy had set on them. When their work was done the hedge-clerks went off with their gold ; but Thorkel sent trustworthy men to witness in the council of clerks, which is named capitulum, that the consecration had taken place and that Grimkel had received ring and crozier.

Canon law provides that whoever shall receive office or consecration from a roving bishop is excommunicated ; but neither God nor men nor yet Dominus papa himself can disable his benedictio or other acts of his holy function, when he is a true successor of the apostles ; and neither capitulum nor suffragans were able to shake Grimkel's bishophood.

Now when Thorkel the Tall came to England, there were few Danes and they had only small fights. But English men came to meet Thorkel from inland, learned and lay, rich and poor, shedding tears of joy that King Ethelred was back in his own country, and praying him to be their king again; but no king could be dearer to them, he was their natural lord by the will of Christ, they said, especially if he would tend their affairs more heedfully than of old.

As we have already said in this book, Ethelred was so peace-loving a king that he never made war on any but his subjects; and then only if he were obliged to fortify them in Christian doctrine, or collect unpaid taxes, when he had not a penny left of his own. Indeed it is held that warfare was so repugnant to him that he fell asleeping if he heard other kings named, and kept his bed if he knew them to be near. It was his delight to sit in a castle, not that he might hurl stones down on his enemies, but to see his consort Emma walking about the halls; meanwhile he carved for her birds of bone, or twined silver thread. He made no doubt that Queen Emma was the fairest woman in Christendom or beyond. He was ready to give all that he had, and all that the English had, his demesnes and halls, as well as the houses and fields of all Englishmen and the realm of England to boot, if he might live in peace with this woman, that he loved with a full heart. And therefore King Ethelred has been called one of the most undecided kings that have ever held sway in England.

But Ethelred had not long sat in his castles enjoying the peace, under the protection of Thorkel and his men, before

a fleet came sailing out of the east, with more ships in it than had yet been seen, on its way to England. This power gave battle by sea and land whenever it was opposed. In this war were great champions and heroes. Thorkel and his men had a custom that has always served better than battle, never to venture life against a stout army. And when they asked who was now venturing on King Ethelred's host, they got the reply that King Knud Svendsson was come from Denmark, chosen by the Danes to be king of England, to succeed to the throne his father Svend Bluetoothsson had conquered in that country. All who were not his perfect friends from the outset should lose life and property.

But though Thorkel had never ruled a kingdom, he was so mighty a man at sea that he could hold his own with most kings, go where he would. He obeyed no man's voice in matters he chose to rule. Now it seemed there was come to England a man whose power at sea was not a whit less than Thorkel Strutharaldsson's. And amid petty skirmishing between vikings and Danes off the English coast or on the headlands above, the chiefs of the viking band held long councils, whether they should truly strive to defend England against King Knud, and what they should venture.

And while this was in the melting-pot, and the chiefs had reached no decision and King Thorkel gave no commands, it befell late one night, that one of Thorkel the Tall's inferior captains, so low in rank that there is not a word of him in the books made by English scholars on these events, called on some of his crew to launch a boat in the darkness and row him out to the Danish fleet, that lay just out to sea. And when they came to Knud's fleet, and the Danish watchmen heard the noise of their oars and bade them stop, one of them spoke up and said:

'Here are unarmed men.'

The watchmen asked what men.

The stranger said: 'I am Olaf Haraldsson from Norway, on a peaceful errand to King Knud.'

The watchmen on the king's ship held a lantern over the boat and looked searchingly at the men; they perceived that

the leader wore many gold rings, and had three cloaks on and two silver belts, and high foreign boots ornamented with gold. And when they had seen these tokens, and that there were no weapons aboard, they showed the men where King Knud's pavilion stood by the seaside.

King Knud Svendsson was eighteen winters old at this point of our story, and he and Olaf Haraldsson were near of an age.

They were much unlike.

Olaf the Stout had been reared on shipboard and had known seasalt and tar, stench and vomit, lice and dryrot, scaldhead and filth, scurvy and the itch, and the sweaty smell of men at sea that have been long without washing. All his schooling had been the lying tales and threadbare old songs of battle and tempest, manhood and famous deeds, with which seamen diverted themselves to pass the time and screw up their hearts, together with washy fooleries about witchwomen north of the North, or lewd rhymes of gods.

King Knud Svendsson was brought up at the courts of kings and bishops, in halls or castles; as a child he had learnt all the exercises proper to men of rank, sword-play and knightly arts, and to wear weapons and clothes as great folk do, and with the same courtesy as the barons that served the emperor. From childhood he had been schooled by the bishops that were sent to Denmark from Bremen, and they never let go of him, though his father Svend had betrayed his religion. Clerks had taught Knud how to spell out Latin books and make responses in choir; he could also pray at the altar with sighs and tears, both genuflectens and prostratus. Knud was pale and fish-eyed, as we often see in that nation; he had thick yellow hair and was as intemperate in his mirth as in tears before the altar; he was in a light-blue tunic and had laid aside his red mantle; he wore richly-embroidered shoes and was girt with a curved scimitar, its golden sheath chased and set with the fairest of precious stones; on his hands were long goatskin gloves; he was sitting drinking with his men and a few singing-girls, when Olaf the Stout came waddling and rocking into his hall,

thick-necked and potbelled, though yet a child, flat-footed and calf-kneed. The girls burst out laughing at this guest bedizened with rings, brooches, pins and much other tinsel, besides many and crumpled cloaks, some too ample, others too strait. The King brought his tankard crashing down on the board, and asked who this kitchen-count might be.

The guest replied: 'I lead a viking band in the fleet of King Thorkel Strutharaldsson the Tall, and my name is Olaf, son to Harald Grenlander of Vestfold in Norway. My great-grandfather was Harald Shockhead, who united all Norway. I would wish to speak with you, lord king, out of others' hearing.'

Then King Knud sent the others out; he laid the mantle over his shoulders and bade his guest sit and drink.

'Maybe while you speak with us you will raise some of those hats you have pulled over your hair, one above another,' said he.

Olaf the Stout turned red, and said that he had been brought up at sea, and it was rather from ignorance of courtesy than want of reverence that he kept hats over his brow when speaking with so high a lord as King Knud. And when he had set his hats right, he lifted up his voice and began:

'We that are Thorkel the Tall's vikings are here with a hundred and two and forty ships, and we have agreed with King Ethelred to defend the land against you. But though we vikings glory in fighting such brisk warriors as these in your host, lord king, yet to be brief, I have had my fill of conquering lands for other kings; I am ready to give the ships I command into your power and be your man, in return for a boon we should think it honour to receive from you.'

King Knud asked: 'What do you propose, comrade?'

'I am thought to have a smooth tongue,' said Olaf Haraldsson, 'and I offer you to persuade the men of Thorkel's fleet, first in secret and then openly, to desert Ethelred and become your army. I know there are many true men among us willing to be your good friends, if you give them counties or towns for their support; some are like to be content with

ready money. We would sooner win your favour with peace than war.'

Knud asked what was Thorkel Strutharaldsson's mind, whether he meant to fight the Danes in the hope of winning Ethelred's power and kingdom.

'Or do you come here, Olaf,' said he, 'as a traitor to both your lords, Thorkel and Ethelred?'

'It is Thorkel's intent,' said Olaf, 'to give battle to the Danes; and in that case we shall be joined by all England that think their lives worth a fight, peasants and townsfolk, young and old, women and men. I have good experience that it is not child's play for a royal army, native or foreign, to fight the commons of England if they choose to defend themselves. In such a fight many a true warrior will succumb to ignoble weapons.'

'What reward would you have, Olaf, if you can stay Thorkel's fleet from fighting against us?' asked King Knud.

'I offer you all Thorkel's fleet and us to be your army in England, and my life hangs on success. But if this plan goes forward, all will think well of it. And I make this condition, that you reward me with fifty light ships to sail to Norway, enter on my inheritance and become king there.'

Then King Knud started up from the bench and struck his tankard against Olaf Haraldsson's mug, so that it flew off the table onto the stone floor and broke; then he gripped his sword-hilt and said:

'Frenzy is loose when the rude and beggarly sons of Norse clowns think they were born to rule kingdoms. It is hard to see whether your childish impudence springs from daring or your daring from impudence, that you seek us on such an errand. Or do you suppose Knud Svendsson degenerate enough to make a runagate kinless boy the gift of Norway, the kingdom my father won by manhood from King Olaf Tryggvason, when Olaf jumped overboard in dread of my father? You are a great baby, Olaf, to think you can coin your fear of me and get fifty ships for your trembling, and the throne of Norway to boot.'

Olaf changed colour when his design was taken so ill. He

said: 'I did not speak to provoke you ; I came to you with intent to be your good friend ; nor have I spoken one word that could be thought guileful. I pray you, lord king, to judge my coming after your magnanimity. It may be that our luck and lot are unlike, but I pray you never to suspect me of quaking for any man' (and yet Olaf Haraldsson was trembling violently as he said this) 'and let us end this talk, if you please, without illwill, and without bruiting it to others.'

With that Olaf Haraldsson bade King Knud farewell, but the king never took his hand from the sword-hilt. And when this guest was gone, he called his men back to the ale, and with them the singing-girls.

Olaf Haraldsson's mug lay on the stone floor in shards.

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Olaf Haraldsson's rowers that had gone with him to Knud Svendsson went back to rest, but Olaf himself could not sleep. He stood long by the gunwale of his ship, watching little waves rising and breaking against the off-shore wind at floodtide under the evening star. And when he had stood a while in thought, he saw a little dinghy rowing out to the ship. A man hailed the watchman, asking for Olaf Haraldsson. And as the newcomer advanced to greet Olaf, he jerked his head till the hood fell back, and cast his eyes up to heaven, and the moonlight fell on his face. It was bishop Grimkel. He said:

'There is a guest with my foster-father Thorkel. They are in talk, and the talk concerns you.'

Olaf asked what guest.

Bishop Grimkel replied: 'A messenger from King Knud Svendsson.'

Olaf asked what this messenger had to say to Thorkel.

'He is come,' said the bishop, 'with the news that you have resolved to betray my foster father Thorkel and make a conspiracy against him, and that your intent is to get so many ships that you can sail to Norway and wrest the land from Knud and kill his jarls.'

Olaf asked whether Thorkel had made known any purpose.

Grimkel replied: 'The last I heard, my foster-father King Thorkel was saying he would not stay beyond daybreak to hang up such a puppy, and that was late.'

At these tidings Olaf Haraldsson was struck dumb, and for a while could not move. Bishop Grimkel went on speaking.

'It came into my mind,' said he, 'that it was you, Olaf, who spared me when you vikings had cut off the noses and ears of Christ's friends, and pelted the body of God's departed friend Ælfheah with horns and rubbish.'

And as bishop Grimkel stood there gazing heavenward as he was wont, and the moon shone on his face, Olaf the Stout clutched his hand and said:

'Tell your friend Christ, Grimkel, that now I beg him alone for aid. I obey his will and lay my fate in his hand, for this is a sore pinch.'

Grimkel looked upward and whispered: 'It reached my ears that one day when you were inspecting your band, the Iclander that is reckoned the stupidest man in the fleet gave you the name of king. I know not what you yourself made of it, but I know that when Christ prophesies to men, he is wont to speak through the mouths of simpletons and not of the wise.'

'How should I, a sea-tossed peasant boy from Vestfold, though indeed I have silver in two sacks, but only these two ancient and paltry tubs and a few poor cabin-dwellers that have flocked to me in their want, seventy men in all--how should I win Norway from so mighty a king as Knud?'

Bishop Grimkel spoke low: 'When King Christ would proclaim his omnipotence, he commonly uses the strength of a man that is frailer and more wretched than others, as

when he chose the little boy David to dispatch the giant Goliath. Christ will surely make you king over Norway, if you swear him fealty.'

Olaf asked what Christ would have him do now.

Grimkel replied: 'Men say of me that I am the jest of clerks and the scrubbiest bishop they have heard tell of, since I have no other living or diocese than Thorkel the Tall's bed and board. I have no father among the clergy and succeed no apostle but that drunken fool from Armenia, who gave me oil and chrisma behind the horse-rumps at market yonder in Rouen. And yet none can take it away, that by this divine and indelible consecration I was made equal with the magnates who rule Christendom and clergy next to the Pope, through the blessing of Christ and inspiration of the Holy Ghost. And because I am the least brother that is called a bishop, it will be given me by Christ to prophesy and work wonders no less than those holy men of Christendom whose names will live as long as the World stands. Now that we are both in straits, Olaf, you shall do penance, because in England you cut off the noses and ears of holy men and flung rubbish at that ancient who in the eyes of Mary and Sunniva and Belinda and other dear kinswomen of God had been one of the manliest since John the Baptist was beheaded, on which account he is now their bidden guest in Heaven. You shall put to sea forthwith, sail to Norway and christen the scum who have their abode there. I shall be your bishop by the will of Christ, and thus we shall ransom ourselves from the everlasting fire.'

Jarl Hakon Eiriksson was the Danish king's vice-regent in Norway. He was sister's son to Knud Svendsson, and in books he is said to have been one of the handsomest men in the North. He was the same age as the youth from Vestfold, then returning to Norway. Hakon was a ruler of the sort that has not come to honour through ambition or violence, he was born to high tasks.

Norway was a meagre and cloven land. From Arild's time peasant kings had ruled over parish kingdoms, and so they still did in name; some were said to have royal blood, others had been feudatories of the robber from Estonia named Olaf Tryggvason, who for a few summers had ravaged the land with fire and called himself king of it; most of these had retained their place and property under the jarls that were put in by the Danish kings to collect tribute, after the Estonian robber had jumped into the sea. There was a pact with these peasant kings, that they should keep their title and heritage as long as they swore fealty to the Danish king. These kings seemed to be well off, and the folk still better; indeed it is an old story, that lands are most flourishing when their kings are furthest away, and unable to vex them with the evils that attend kings: taxation and pillage, quartering and levying of armies, manslaying and lechery. All had blessed their good luck when King Knud the Dane, who made claim to Norway, left these Northlands for ever to subdue far-off nations west over seas.

And since Hakon Eiriksson was remote from the Norsemen, and ruled for a yet more distant suzerain, and chiefs born in the land had no mastery, they set store by him. Indeed he let all men do as they would in most things, and

this freedom brought peace and prosperity to the land, as was natural. Moreover Hakon taxed gently, nor did he oppress the peasants with frequent visits, and never with a great following. Mostly he sat quiet in Viken and diverted himself with sports or hunting, or sang out of a book with the clerks that had errands from the see of Bremen, for in Viken Christianity had long been perfect. It was an effect of Hakon's popularity that he had no need of an army or fighting ships.

Hakon Eiriksson, the jarl of Norway, had been born of Christian parents and baptised as an infant ; and so it was not with him as with many who adopt the faith in mature years, and exhibit great gusts of penitence and compunction for former sins against the true God, and so rage against others that it would be far better if they had never repented. Hakon was not least endeared to the peasants for this cause, that he left all men to their own faith or want of it ; Norsemen had not had eyes pierced or tongues torn out nor suffered other bodily harm for their religion, nor yet had their houses burned for gods' sake, since the passing of Olaf Tryggvason. Hakon was the friend of heathens and Christians alike, and his friends were all willing to be Christian for love of this young man. Many chiefs expected Christ to bring them more luck than other gods, and built Churches or gave land and property, and German clerks journeyed all the way north from Bremen to Rogaland to sponsor folk and sing mass, and took back with them young men from over the country that had a mind to get clerkly learning in the South.

Thus Olaf Haraldsson returned home to a thriving and peaceful nation ; the folk were no worse Christians than most in our northern continent at that time, setting aside bishops' palaces, cloisters and imperial cities or seats of great kings.

It may be read in books that Olaf the Stout landed in mid-Norway. After that he at once betook himself to Hringariki, to his foster-father Sigurd Halfdanarson Sow, in company with bishop Grimkel ; his band stayed behind to guard his two ships, and they were scarce seventy men.

Sigurd Halfdanarson was a great yeoman and a bustling lord ; he had some of the biggest herds of cattle in Norway and was a mighty husbandman ; he owned broad and rich acres in many shires and had a hold upon every peasant king in the Uplands and Dales. Sigurd Sow not only took rents for land, he had also trading-ships, and the merchants brought him silver and precious things and useful wares from abroad. Sigurd had got Olaf Haraldsson into the bargain when he wedded his mother Asta Gudbrandsdaughter, and Olaf was then a child.

Olaf the Stout's father, Harald of Grenland, had been burnt alive over a woman. He was one of those vagrants, speaking the Northern tongue, but whose birth was unknown to most, who came journeying from distant lands and claimed to rule Norway, all on the same plea of being descended from Harald Shockhead or Comelyhair, a ruffian who had sprung up in Norway six generations or about a hundred and fifty winters before. Olaf's mother, Asta, married the yeoman Sigurd Halfdanarson Sow for his wealth, and Sigurd was thought liberal when he paid over the boy's inheritance and added two small ships, calling them his tooth-gift.

Sigurd Halfdanarson did not take his rights by force, but used discretion and subtlety in all things ; he was known as a man of peace and goodwill, but not high-minded. His family had deep roots far about the country ; he kept on good terms with those of his blood who were great men in the assemblies of the Dales and Uplands ; they were welcome for his part to take the title of king at these assemblies by consent of their tenants, in the ancient manner, or grant it to themselves if no others would, all the more if they were punctual with the rent of the farms they leased from him.

Sigurd Sow was not much for novelties in religion and custom. He disliked Christianity, but turned a blind eye to it if his tenants or debtors kept their day ; he worshipped the privy member of his most glorious and godlike stallion, that was hallowed to Frey ; he had dedicated to the horse's member a standing stone on a slope of the infield, and built

a fence round it, and sacrificed to the member in spring and autumn and drank its health at Yule. It is told that when bishop Grimkel saw this stone he was stricken with sore grief in Christ at such maleficium and wept aloud.

When Sigurd Sow's wife, Asta, got her twenty-year-old son home from viking after eight winters abroad, she set her household sweeping and hanging cloths and burning juniper twigs and killing pigs, and made all ready after the best fashion of great folk. She bade Olaf Haraldsson welcome and kissed his hand and foot, and then led him to the master's place and seated herself on his right hand and bade bishop Grimkel sit at his left. And yeoman Sigurd was somewhat taken aback, to be given a place opposite the master's in his own hall, but yet he laughed. And when they had sat a while at table, mother and son opened their thought, which was that Olaf Haraldsson should be king of all Norway, but then yeoman Sigurd laughed loud and long.

When Olaf saw that his foster-father thought they were jesting, he laid his knife on the platter, pale in the face, and spoke thus:

'It will be best, Sigurd yeoman, not to have laughed at that which is now beginning, for it is truly my will to make myself king of Norway with needful power, though what I now have may be little in human eyes.'

Then Sigurd Sow laughed no more, but asked how it happened that a young vagabond, scarce with down on his chin and without support of kinsfolk and with two paltry little ships, had got such a whim in his head.

Olaf replied: 'Though the wealth of my kin be scattered, yet I am of no meaner blood than that King Olaf Tryggvason was my cousin, and my great-grandfather was Harald Shock-head, and both subdued Norway. As much as any of our stock I was born to this heritage. Though my ships be few and my men only a handful of foreign ragamuffins, I have made alliance with a king to whom the realm of Norway is a leaf in a bird's beak, and that is Christ; I have sworn for his sake to save men's souls from the everlasting fire, and he in return is to aid me with the power of his miracles and other

great matters. And in token of our alliance he has sent his son bishop Grimkel, who was anointed and inspired with the Holy Ghost in Rouen, to hold my hand and raise anew in this country the standard of God the Almighty and my kinsman Olaf Tryggvason.'

Sigurd said: 'It has always been held uncertain who were sons of Harald Shockhead; to be sure he got thralls and gangrel women with child all over the country during seventy winters; for noblewomen had little taste for so lousy a man. Every fool calls himself Harald's heir or by-heir who has since come up to plague Norway, and all men laugh, as I laughed but now, when boasted lineage has nothing to back it up. Yet it shall not be gainsaid, that men seeking to remedy their own and other folk's troubles with fire and bloody deeds may well be descended from Harald Shockhead, both Olaf Tryggvason and other landloupers like your father Harald of Grenland, who was burnt alive over a woman. But however doubtful their lineage that think themselves scions of Harald Shockhead, I have even more doubt about the lineage of Whitechrist, so you must needs tell me in plainer words what backing and help of arms he means to give you.'

Then Olaf stood up and made the following speech:

'Christ has promised me such backing as we have never had from the gods that received our blood-offerings of old; he has taught us how needful it is for all men to redeem their souls from fire and the serpent. And a king going into battle for Christ's sake will never be luckless as we vikings were, when we fought uninspired by the Holy Ghost and unprompted of God, and old gutter-women splashed us with piss. Christ will raise up the men I have need of in every battle; and among my friends will be the Pope and the Emperor and the King of Byzantium, besides Robert Capet, and moreover all the bishops and archbishops that Christ has anointed, and myriads of saints and archsaints, angels and archangels and other heaven-dwellers, that stand with chariots and Greek fire by the side of every king giving Christian battle; and such a king, seeking the purgation of his land, shall also be raised up to eternal glory in Heaven, and that though he fall. Now

the folk of Norway shall choose whether to be redeemed from fire and serpent or die the death.'

Queen Asta Gudbrandsdaughter rose from her seat at these words, and there were patches of red on her neck and cheeks, and she delivered herself thus:

'I have always known, Sigurd yeoman, that you were a man of peace, but I did not think you a coward; that could never be said of King Harald of Grenland, though he returned penniless from viking cruise and had no say in the last fire of his life.' And in short, I would sooner be matched with a poor man willing to venture something to attain kingship and glory, though he were burnt alive, than with a pigdealer to whom great heart and kingly mind are a laughing-stock, who amasses butter in his cellar and silver at the bottom of his chest, and offers sacrifice in his impotence to Frey's tail. And now it is time, Sigurd, for you to choose. Either you shall aid my son with your wealth, kindred and good repute to attain the kingship of Norway, or you shall never come in my bed.'

Then King Sigurd replied smiling: 'My cottar's heart need not stay us from drinking a worthy welcome to your son, housewife. So it is, Olaf, that I am ageing and losing the power to gainsay your mother Queen Asta, and all the more now that she will have more backing. And it looks as though the god you speak of were enlisting help and strength far and wide, though such a god seems to me tedious in comparison with our friend King Frey, who has a bigger member than other gods.'

Olaf did not think it expedient to kill one who was Knud's jarl. Yet he was in still greater fear of the Norsemen's rage, if so gentle and unvexatious a ruler were to be suddenly and causelessly made away with; he knew besides that such doings would raise illwill among Christian chiefs abroad, and nowhere more than at the archiepiscopal seat of Bremen, which administered papal law and justice in the North. But he had his spies abroad to warn him of the jarl's motions; and just as Sigurd Sow betook himself on a circuit of the Uplands and Dales, privily soliciting the aid of yeoman and other worthies for the new pretender, Olaf learnt that Hakon was on his way southward from Sogn to his winter seat, and that he had but one ship. Olaf and his men launched their two ships and sailed north in the hope of catching him. And when it appeared that the jarl's ship had anchored for the night in a sound, they lay in wait and sailed secretly by night between skerries, till the jarl's men became aware that a ship had closed in on either side of them in the dark, and armed men were boarding.

That night Olaf Haraldsson took Hakon jarl prisoner. And when the jarl asked into what robber-hands he had fallen, Olaf told him his name and lineage and his intent to be king of Norway. He said Hakon was to leave the country forthwith, and take an oath not to defend it against him, or he should be cut down that very night. The jarl was untried, a weak man and not much for deeds, so he yielded to Olaf the Stout without a struggle. He took the oath Olaf required of him and was sped on his way. Daylight had come when the jarl and his men put out to sea.

Of Knud Svendsson it is to be said, that he had deprived King Ethelred of the one thing left him, which was Queen Emma. First Thorkel the Tall had seized King Ethelred's movables and Svend Bluetoothsson his throne and kingdom ; now Knud took Queen Emma to wife and drove King Ethelred to the woods, where he lived with some of his courtiers and captains as an outlawed thief, stealing barn-yard fowls to keep body and soul together, till the peasants likewise drove them away. Then King Ethelred fled to an out-skerry and ate fox-flesh and gnawed roots till his death. Ethelred was king over seven carved birds of bone when he breathed his last.

When Jarl Hakon Eiriksson landed in England, he went straight to his kinsman Knud with the tidings that there was come to Norway a calf-kneed and hugely fat peasant boy in a blue cloak over a red and with a right shoe on the left foot and a left shoe on the right foot. He was in command of two old ferry-smacks and a handful of foreign runagates and meant to subdue the country. Knud laughed and said spring would be the time to send men to Norway to kill Olaf the Sneak. Then he made his kinsman Hakon earl of Northumberland, and Hakon is out of the story.

It is said in olden tales that just as Hakon jarl's ship was turning its prow seaward, a man in bright clothes came down the afterdeck and rapped on the bulwark with the shaft of his spear, like a kingsman calling for silence in the guard-room ; he put one hand to his mouth like a horn, and shouted, asking whether King Olaf Haraldsson was near enough to hear his words. Olaf's men wondered who this could be that gave their leader the name of king, and they replied :

'The king is indeed here.'

The richly clad man then said :

'Welcome shall you be to this land, King Olaf Haraldsson, to raise this nation from an inglorious life and restore the kingship of Norway. I have made a song of you, and desire to recite it, if I have your leave.'

Olaf's face lit up at these words, but he said that to his mind skald's work was perplexing and somewhat tedious.

'Who are you, the one man in Norway who has chosen to greet me in seemly fashion?'

The gaudy man said: 'Norse I am not, though my speech is Danish. I am an Icelandic skald. And it is my hope that the most glorious king born in Norway since Yngvifreyr will not shut his ears to my praises.'

'This is strange,' said Olaf the Stout. 'You have never set eyes on me till now, and no fame has run before me, though tonight I have seized you Hakonsmen, and yet you have had leisure to make a song of me. What manner of Icelander are you?'

'I am Sigvat from Apavatn,' said he, 'son to Thord skald who for a great while followed your lord King Thorkel Strutharaldsson aviking, and now sits by a little tarn in a meadow spying after strange fish in the water, and his mind is to die. He left me your manly deeds to make a song, and I have put words to them. In these songs your name shall be preserved while the ages roll. Now will you hear, king, what cuckoos shouted of you, or will you send the author of your renown away with your unfriends?'

Olaf said the jarl's ship was not to sail till he had had speech with this man, and ordered a rope-walk to be stretched between the ships: Sigvat skald climbed aboard Olaf the Stout's ship. He had no baggage but his gold-mounted spear and the clothes he stood up in, on top a red tunic edged with fur; he wore a rich arm-ring and was a lively, black-eyed man. Jarl Hakon Eiriksson was sitting by the helm in the stern of his ship, and had wrapped his fur cloak about him, and looked silently on as the skald changed ships.

Olaf Haraldsson greeted his guest and asked: 'Why do you forsake your lord now, when fate has dealt so unequally with us kings?'

'Because birds have told me that you are to be lord of this land,' said Sigvat. 'But we skalds are the voice of a king's luck, and heralds of the hero conquering kingdoms. Only give me audience. I will make the glory and praise of your

bygone deeds equal to the fullness of fame prepared for you by the Norns. And I hope to be received as your follower.'

Olaf the Stout answered: 'It will be strange if you are my follower on the day I have need of skald's aid, since you are leaving this jarl now you see him downed; yet he is more of a king than I and a better Christian and one of the proudest men in the North, and of such high descent that he rules for Knud. I have an inkling that so noble a suzerain as Knud will find for this jarl a better dwelling-place than I shall ever call mine, though he now sit humbled and pale, drawing his cloak about him.'

In the evening they went ashore to drink at one of Sigurd Sow's farms; there Olaf the Stout and his men heard the lay made by Sigvat Thordsson in praise of his fifteen greatest battles. But since the Iclander's eulogy of the mild king Olaf Haraldsson embraced more tortuous land-lore and dark allusions to heroic journeys abroad than men could keep in their minds, and since few were old enough in the band to have been in all the places Olaf had harried, and indeed but a very few knew the names of the places they had harried themselves, but yet especially since these landloupers, of whom scarce any were from the North, some were Irish or from Orkney, but most foreigners, could make little of skald's Danish, but all knew themselves to be champions and redoubtable fellows, they did not think their leader was overpraised; they could hear that the lay was very good. And Olaf the Stout took Sigvat skald as his follower from that time.

That winter Sigurd Sow was much on the roads, with much that was costly in his pack-saddles. It appeared that this clodhopper, who had sat at home in obscurity all his life, had far greater wealth at his command, both in ready money and valuables, than a viking could get by deeds of imperishable renown in far countries.

Now great consultations began in the dales and uplands, as well as on the nesses, in the fjords and wherever else Sigurd had friends, kinsmen or stewards; first between man and man, then at feasts and drinking-parties; but towards the end of winter the peasants were called together. In some shires the small kings announced their resolve to give up the kingly title, if those who had land under them would agree, and serve that noble man who had landed to unite Norway in the style of his forefathers and become king of it, Olaf the Stout. The commons had little objection, nor indeed is it easy to keep kings on the throne that are bent on coming down from it. Olaf himself rode to many Things, and folk gaped to see him so lordly; he wore many coloured cloaks and great finger and arm rings, he was pot-bellied and spindle-limbed and without the gaiety of young men. Some peasants hailed his kingship with clapping, others growled in their beards; some chiefs were prevailed on by Sigurd Sow to give him their sons, to swell and adorn the following he had brought from over sea. Olaf now rode far and wide through the country with his train, and took oath from some of the better men, and always bishop Grimkel was at his side, holding a great cross before him and looking upward. And it was found that where Sigurd Sow had been with his packhorses in the winter, there was nothing in the

way of homage to Olaf. Wherever he went, Olaf gave out that he would have men baptised after the example of the Emperor Charles the Great and Olaf Tryggvason, those worldly magnates who have been reckoned the chief pillars of Christendom in the World. He made known his will that churches should be given more treasure and land than before, and said Christ should go halves with him in land and movables throughout Norway; and Grimkel took young men in his charge and taught them to make signum crucis and sing credo and paternoster and psalter, whereupon he ordained them priests. Further, Olaf outdid the emissaries of Bremen by making known that such as refused the faith or to adopt Christian manners under him should be put to death. And so well did he vie with the archbishop for the favour of Christ, that he baptised more in the Uplands in a few days than German suffragans in Viken had won over in many generations, thus refuting those who said a simpleton had come over sea to Norway, along with a strolling clerk under the ban. King Olaf like many Christian rulers pleased himself with calling twelve of his henchmen apostles, after Christ's chosen; his nearest men he called after the kings of the East, who came with gold, incense and myrrh to adore the Master.

But it is an old story, that common folk are not to be sold as lightly as kings sell their kingdoms. Here and there peasants stood out against the new ordinances attending the change of rule. But the folk of Norway had not conceived sufficient hate of this Olaf, who was quite unknown to them, and there was no leadership to raise an army against him; or if a small band rose up somewhere, it was quickly scattered. But the firmer the pretender's footing in the country, the harsher grew his proceedings. He soon returned to his wont on viking cruise, sought out the men whose truth he suspected and fell on them unawares, hewing them down or burning them in their houses and seizing their property, while his friends were required to maintain him and his following.

In Norse law there was a provision that king and thrall

should in some respects weigh alike ; by law fire-raisers were more wholly severed from the community than other malefactors, and though it were a king who burned, he became a proscribed outlaw no less than a thrall, and was called a firewolf and had forfeited both his life and all he possessed in land or goods.

We know not whether it was from ignorance of the law or from childish heedlessness that Olaf the Stout began ravaging Norway with fire, the one misdeed which was not allowed there even to a king. There were some who knit their brows, when the king Sigurd Sow had bought folk to serve, and others had acknowledged at thing-meeting, fell on Raumariki with three hundred men, at one swoop burned in their houses the great men that ruled that country, and gave their lands to the church.

And when this tale got abroad, some chiefs appointed to meet each other and consult what was best to do, now that such a firewolf was come to Norway. At this council were some of the chiefs with the name of king, among them the king who had fled from Raumariki when Olaf was burning there, and the kings of the Dales ; there was also the king of Heidmörk and the king of Hadaland. Their meeting-place was a thing-seat and ancient temple in Heidmörk, that is named Hringisakur. It lies on a slope above the great water which was once known in the dale as Heidsœvi, but by Snorri the Wise is called Vatn. Most chiefs from east of the fells were gathered there, all who had not been purchased by Sigurd Sow or sold land and title. They were peasant chiefs and had never been out aviking, knew therefore little of war, and had no schooling but what can be got in quiet places : such kings as know how to go about forging iron, casting bronze and chasing silver, or building houses to look as though they had made themselves ; they could also cut runes on billets and carve dragons on posts, and praise in verse the bearing that earns a man esteem in the thing, and after his death a name that will live. They were slow of speech, but knew every law that ran in Norway ; over the ale they told ribald stories of intercourse between

gods and giants, and talked of doings north of the furthest sea, where the witch-women live.

And as they sat at Hringisakur, it was settled among them that on account of these fearful tidings in Norway they should levy an army against Olaf the Stout, and the day of meeting was fixed. Each king was to raise three hundred men for this army, those who had weapons should bring them and others bring what would serve. And when they had settled this, they had drink set before them and fell into lighter talk and sent the ale round, before lying down to sleep.

But of Olaf Haraldsson it is to be said, that when he had done burning in Raumariki he called a thing; here he sat in judgment; but Grimkel began teaching paternoster to tramps. And while they were thus occupied, Olaf got word from Hringariki that the kings had made a conspiracy against him and in three nights were to meet at Hringisakur.

Olaf at once revealed this news to his men, and bade them spur off to Hringisakur in Heidmörk and fall on the kings.

But when they had ridden a good way and were nearing the kings' trysting-place, some of Olaf Haraldsson's men, born and bred in Norway, fell into two minds; they were afraid to burn any more at present; there were some too that had ties of blood with the kings, and murmuring in the band increased. Those that were Olaf's picked men said there was no harm in maiming or roasting heathens; but others denied that the kings of Norway ought to burn in their houses because it was Christ who built Heaven and not Thor.

And when Olaf the Stout heard that there was wrangling in the army, he first took counsel with his picked men, and then called an assembly in a forest clearing and addressed his band; and he is said to have been a more persuasive speaker than most in Norway, whether between man and man or on his feet at the thing.

In his speech he set forth how all the great kings of Christendom have always proffered the true religion with fire and flame, and how Charles the Great, who was the

noblest of all emperors before God, had in one morning cut down forty long hundreds of Saxons, after he had baptised them all in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, thus redeeming their souls from fire and serpent. He said there was nothing better than mutilation and conflagration for chastising sins and calling up luminous visions of the salvation Christ gives to men ; and especially if the foremost among the peasants are roasted alive, mutilated or beheaded. As an example he told how the very pillar of Christianity, Otto the German, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, had marched south and blinded the anti-pope John and cut off his nose and tongue, so that the rightful pope Sylvester might be enthroned and the lustre of Christ wax exceedingly.

And when he had addressed his men a great while on how needful it was to fortify Christianity, he asked his friend bishop Grimkel of Canterbury to step forward, the man on whom true consecration and unction had bestowed Holy Ghost to speak next the Pope on behalf of Christ. He bade him expound in plain words whether Christ meant to do away with killing and burning in the World, or forbid the maiming of heathen kings and the anti-pope.

‘How else are the commons to be saved?’ said he.

¶Grimkel lifted the cross and took a step forward at his lord’s bidding, and pronounced in the woods of Norway the discourse which old books render in these words:

‘Christ is indeed king of kings as of all men, but the hour is not come when all kings acknowledge Christ. And therefore we have not yet the peace which in holy writings is called so good that the dead awaken, and so long that coulter are made from swords. And as long as that peace is not established, we have it laid down by all the more considerable bishops and church fathers and holy doctors, as well as in the teachings of the Lord Pope, and in Christ’s own words, who is lord of the Judgment and the World’s end, where he prescribes the sword, that it is not circumspect or judicious to give or indiscriminately observe laws which forbid killing of men or wasting of townlands that spurn the Redemption of the Soul.’

And bishop Grimkel of Canterbury further said:

"I was by when archbishop Ælfheah, my spiritual father, was stoned with rubbish and horns by heathen men from the North, and my brothers who went to school with me were mutilated by scores, as well as my virgin sisters. Now the day is at hand when Northern heathens in their homeland shall be given with good measure, pressed down, shaken and overflowing, what they measured to us in Canterbury. My spiritual son King Olaf has laid on himself this penance, that to every man born of woman in Norway, king or thrall, who denies the Soul's Redemption, he will mete out iron and fire, and when this atonement is perfect he will be named the most glorious king in these Northlands.'

Olaf the Stout and his men were so speedy that the kings had no warning. They hid in woods and came to Hringisakur in the night and received bishop Grimkel's blessing before going to work. The kings had no men with them but their serving-men and horse-boys; when they woke that night, Olaf the Stout's army had closed them in.

The sun was up, shining on water and wood, when Olaf Haraldsson had kings and other good men brought out to the courtyard behind the dwelling-houses. Most were in their night-shirts or other scant clothing. It was a still day, says Snorri. Olaf ordered the kings to be bound. Then he went up to the line and called one who knew them, to tell him the name and descent of each. There were kings who had kinsmen in Olaf's army; and these interceded with him for the lives of their friends, and he admitted some chiefs to strike hands with him on an oath that they would fly the country and never return to Norway; but he spared none who claimed kindred with himself. There were some eager to kiss his foot, and with these he dealt at his whim. And there were aged men that declared they were not going to plead with a kinless boy for mercy, a firewolf and thief, who was no more of a Norseman than the Eastlander Olaf Tryggvason. Olaf the Stout said these were to be removed forthwith and presently hanged.

After that Olaf Haraldsson drew out of his bag the tools

that were dearer to him than most, and that he had bought in England and ever since kept handy, to wit his torturing-gear. He picked out the men he would maim, and directed how the kings were to be made ready for torture. Bishop Grimkel said paternoster and sang psalterium beate Marie virginis before the tortures, which is the Ave Maria. And Olaf's men looked on, together with serving men and women of Hringisakur, some out of stable doors, others from door-steps or through peepholes, as this paunchy man, blue-eyed, fair-haired, and with chin scarce downy, stepped forward with his head in the air, and went up to the bound, barefooted Norse kings, most of them greybeards tousled from sleep. There Olaf Haraldsson blinded King Hrœrek of Heidmörk, as is known from Icelandic books, and pulled the tongue out of the mouth of King Gudröd of the Dales and cut it off at the roots; and he laid the eyes of the one and tongue of the other carefully by in his napkin as a remembrance. Old men who had defied Olaf in words were led off to a barn. There bishop Grimkel sang by his cross the holy psalm miserere, casting his eyes meekly up to heaven, while ropes were laid over the rafters. There the old men were hanged. And thus was Norway given wholly to Christ. There are blackcock and capercailzie there in the woods, and these forest birds were shaking the night-dew from their wings as King Olaf Haraldsson washed the blood from his hands.

The king said they were to set fire to the buildings that had sheltered his enemies in this place, and then build a church.

But when Hringisakur was again settled and a church built, they removed the farm higher up the lakeside. The bank is now grassy and deserted, where Norway's kings were led out; blackcock and capercailzie are heard in the woods as of old. The sun's rays were falling upon the quiet waves of the lake, when I went by on a morning of late spring.

Now the story moves west to Isafjord Deep. At Ögur flourished a more abounding happiness than had been seen elsewhere in the Westfjords, or far and wide throughout other districts. From the time when Vermund the chief had eked out his kinsman Thormod's having with land and other goods to make him a match for Thordis Katlasdaughter, and their wedding had been held and Thormod become a householder, the neighbourhood forgot his past courses, and how short a while ago he had been rampaging as Thorgeir Havarsson's mate; and Vermund paid full atonement for the oath-brothers' questionable exploits at Hornstrands, in which Thormod had a share. It is still told in Isafjord Deep that while Thormod dwelt at Ögur he had a good name in the district; none has it to say of him that in those years he ever molested any peasant, or behaved otherwise than with perfect mildness. Nor did he show any craving for honour or power in the district, but lived quiet on his own land, familiar with none, and giving himself as little trouble to make friends as foes. In his youth, as was said before, he had been nimbler at games than most men in the west, and sprightly in large gatherings; but after his return from the viking cruise to Horn, and parting with his oath-brother, he left off most games and sought none of the places where folk get together for pastime. It is held further that in all Thormod's days as a yeoman he approached no woman but Thordis his wedded wife, the unpractised girl who had left her window open at night to see what came of it. She was indeed her husband's one love, of those that embrace a man's heart with wife and limb.

And so report has it that never was there equal or greater love between a married pair in the west.

Isafjord Deep shone with the light that in ancient lore is named after Gimli. Thordis Katlasdaughter ruled in this light, not now an inquisitive little maid opening to the athlete at dark against her own will, but an honoured matron in a rich countryside, soft of speech and yet warm, her gaze steady yet sparkling with the blue of heaven, her hair more ash-coloured than in childhood, yet full as plenteous; and her skin was so drunk with sun that there was a golden light about her, as though the bright air itself had taken the form of a woman; and we find in olden tales that such women were thought to change their guise in sleep and fly through the air as swans.

Thormod Coalbrowsskald worshipped this golden image of woman above all he had, and next her two daughters she had borne him; these he called after Moon and Star. He is said to have loved his wife and daughters so dear that he minded nothing else of a day, and could never have done praising the treasure that may drop in a poor man's lap above the mould, though he must soon die. It is not related that Thormod was much for husbandry, though most work came easy to him if he chose to set about it; and he is held to have laid skald's work and other wisdom entirely aside in the years he dwelt at Ögur in bliss. -

And then one early morning at haymaking time, when folk at Ögur had just risen to go about their tasks, it befell them to glance out of the main door, and there by the gate spy something unlooked for: it was a man's head. The head was fixed to a pole and looking towards the house. This head was large, swollen and not comely; it was likest a seal-head inside out; the lips were eaten away, and the end of the nose; the jaws grinned wide, the tongue was drawn out through the teeth, the eyes were glazed and sunken and the hair foul with old clotted blood; few had ever seen so ugly a head.

And as all were shuddering at this sight, the women sent for the thrall Kolbak and told him to bestir himself, before

master and mistress were up, and take down that pole, that wicked man had planted in malice. Kolbak answered that to be sure he was a thrall, yet the women had better mind their own work than his.

'Besides,' said the thrall, 'that head is not aimed at me, and I shall not take it down.'

Then the little girls came out of the house to fetch their play-things. The thrall said:

'Go in, little ones, and tell your mother there is a head here by the gate that she alone can get rid of, if she will.'

And when Thordis Katlasdaughter stood among her folk in the courtyard, with a golden gleam about her head in the early morning, she at once asked what was this head that had been set up here in the night. There was no plain answer, and none would own to the head. Kolbak thrall spoke up:

'This head that has sought you out, mistress,' said he, 'you shall tell me whether or not to bury before your husband wakes up. You have the choice, whether to see it buried without consulting him or wait till he wakes. Then he will choose between your head and this.'

The mistress laughed, and said that if there was fate in this head, it was not given her to avert such a head.

'And in that case it would serve me little to bury it, for every man some day finds his fate. And now go indoors, my goldilocks, and rouse your father and say that now he is come, who has been long on the way. I always knew he would come to the door on a sweet morning like this, with the sun shining over Isafjord Deep and the ciderducks leaving their nests.'

The little girls ran into the house and went to their father's bedside; the elder kissed his foot in the bed, and the younger pressed the tip of his nose with her forefinger, and so they woke him. Thormod sat up in the bed, caught both the little girls in his arms and asked what news.

'Father,' said the youngest, 'there is a head out there on a stake, and never was such an ugly one.'

'What kind of head?' said he.

Then the eldest girl said: 'I believe, father, that the Devil is come, the creature God has hounded and tortured most and bound fast, that we call the Midgard snake, and when it gets loose the World will come to an end.'

'These are no small tidings,' said Thormod skald, and he put the little girls down, threw a cloak about him and thrust his feet into shoes. Then he went out. And as he passed through the door, he saw his wife standing in the courtyard and all his folk staring at that large ugly head, and all were greatly perturbed and wondering how the head had got there. Thormod went straight to the stake, gazed on the head for a moment, and spoke thus:

'Well I know the head, though not all its journeyings; the head of my oath-brother Thorgeir Havarsson is come to fetch me.'

And with these words he took it down from the stake and kissed it, while the little girls burst out wailing to see their father kiss so loathly a head. Thormod Coalbrowsskald warned all his folk, old and young, to do nothing rashly, saying this head should assuredly have the welcome it deserved; he asked his wife for a costly cloth to wrap round it, and then bore it carefully in his hands to an outhouse further away from the gate. Then he bade the housefolk get to their work.

And when Thormod had found a lodging for the head, wrapped it in the cloth and talked with it a while, he sent his men round the countryside to inquire who had been seen on the roads of late, or if any were known to have landed from a ship. He learnt that there had been two vagrants on the fell; they seemed to be west bound over the moors, and were carrying between them a pole, from which hung a lump of something, most like the hind part of a ram, that they might have had in alms; folk had taken them for Butraldi Brusason and his follower Louse-Oddi, who were still roving about the Westfjords.

Thormod had no sooner heard these tidings than he launched his boat and betook himself to Vatnsfjord, to have speech with Vermund. At this point of our story the chief

was far gone in years, yet he made out that it was his kinsman Thormod, bade him sit by his cushion and asked the news. Thormod was not slow to relate how Thorgeir Havarsson's head had been set on a stake before the door at Ögur, and asked whether Vermund could tell who had been carrying this head about the Westfjords.

Old Vermund replied that the head Thormod spoke of would be malignant whether it were dead or alive, and that he certainly had not been lugging such an abomination around the Westfjords. Thormod asked after Butraldi and Louse-Oddi, and where such riff-raff were likely to find shelter just now. Vermund said most likely they had removed to Greenland, for men that had little to expect in the Westfjords could fall back on that.

Thormod said it sounded to him as though Vermund knew better than himself what had been going on.

'Therefore I would ask you not to flee and jeer at me in this matter. You know there was a time when we were good friends, I and that kingsman, whose head I found on a stake before the great door at Ögur.'

Vermund said: 'It seems to me you should rather be giving me thanks for having bought you the best match in the west country.'

Thormod asked whether Vermund knew for sure that the wretches he had just named were Thorgeir Havarsson's deaths-men.

Vermund replied: 'I neither know nor care who cut Thorgeir Havarsson's head off, nor whether Butraldi and Louse-Oddi bought the head up north from strolling folk. It seems to me more to the point that the head has now been given its due. Thorgeir was dispatched at his peril by the king of Norway to kill some of our west-country farmers, who last year beat some of his merchants and confiscated their wares for the price they thought fit to pay; and it was by my advice that they paid no more. We in the west think it not amiss that King Olaf should be made to feel he cannot set footpads on us at pleasure, to kill good men of our district before our eyes, though now I grow old apace.'

With respect to Thorgeir Havarsson's death and where it befell, it will be long till scholars can satisfy us; there is great divergence in the old books. Yet on one point all authorities speak as one, and there is not a book written or story told which makes a doubt but that Thorgeir Havarsson was killed in his sleep and not in battle, and moreover, that his life was not ended by the weapon of a hero, nor indeed of an honest man that had name or fame; all the books agree that his killers were nameless wretches, and that wood from his weapons and shield was used as firewood. Some stories tell that in a harbour where ships were delayed by the wind, scullions had gone from their pots to look for kindling, and found the hero asleep in a shed at noonday with a lump of driftwood under his head; his neck was exposed on the block and his chin stuck up in the air, and he is said to have lain right handy for hewing; so they had gone up and cut his head off, and broken the shafts from his spear and axe, and split his shield and the block on which they had made an end of him, and put all this under the pots; now they had no need to look for sticks or driftwood that day. It may also be read in old books that strollers from Greenland cut up Thorgeir's body and pulled his heart out, for they had a mind to see how so rare a heart, that could tremble neither for life nor death, was made; and the story goes that the heart proved to be very small and strangely hard, and when the scullions had eyed it a long time, they seethed it to jelly and divided it among them and ate it for increase of their strength and manhood. It is also held that King Olaf had sent Thorgeir Havarsson to Iceland to kill certain Icelanders in the west that he was at odds with, and that the king had grown weary of Thorgeir, who complained that as Olaf's man he could never encounter such perils, hardship and stress as became him. It is thought that when King Olaf sent Thorgeir to Iceland to kill Icelanders, it was in the hope that this journey would be his last. King Olaf's envoys were always ill seen in Iceland while the king was alive, for whether they came in peace or war they had commonly the one errand, to persuade

Icelandic chiefs to sell him the country. And there is a tradition at Hornstrands and in the Jökulfjords and Isafjord Deep that Butraldi Cowsucker and Thorgeir's quondam thrall Louse-Oddi, who were frequent sorners at fishing-places and roadsteads, bought Thorgeir's head of the scullions for brushwood and carried it between them on a pole to Isafjord Deep, where they brought it to Vermund and asked what he would give them for it. In some books Vermund is said to have replied that he did not want the head, but that they should have food and other entertainment when they had found a place for it.

South in Borgarfjord, Thorgeir Havarsson's mother Thorelf was dead; but his kinsman Thorgils Arason was laying up treasure at Reykjaholar. Thormod Coalbrowsskald rode over to Thorgils with the news that his kinsman Thorgeir Havarsson had been killed at a northern roadstead, he that was the greatest hero born in the Westfjords, and King Olaf Haraldsson's man, and that riff-raff had killed the champion as he slept, and brought away his head and set it up on a stake at the door of Ögur.

'It is nothing to me where that manslayer's head is set up,' said Thorgils Arason. 'My luck has been unlike his, though we were akin, since I have made myself rich by not killing. Nor have I a mind to go killing human lice in my old age, though there are like enough to be some in odd corners that in mere sluggishness offer to be killed; and I advise you, my friend, to do as I have, go home and make yourself rich by giving men life.'

But when Thormod got home to Ögur, he went straight to his outhouse to greet his oath-brother Thorgeir's head. And when he lifted the rich napkin from the champion's face it looked far uglier than before, and filled the outhouse with stench, and carrion-flies had been laying their eggs in the head. Then Thormod strewed salt on it, trusting to defend so noble a head from too drastic harrying by vermin.

Now it was so late in the summer that no more ships would be putting out this year, and Thormod sat at home on his farm. In the autumn he grew very silent, shunned company

and took little note of what was passing around him, but looked the deeper into his own thoughts ; and when his wife seated herself in his lap, he stroked her hair absently. He stared at his little girls at play as though from an inaccessible distance, or as though he were seeing strange visions on the ocean-bed ; but he no longer called them to come and sit on his knee. He wandered aimlessly out and in, setting about nothing, only muttering dark verses. Many a night while others slept he rose quietly from his bed and went to the outhouse and spoke long in the night with Thorgeir Havars-son's head.

★ 37 ★

Kolbak thrall had a fine cock that made itself often heard of a night. This fowl crowed in the evening as folk were going to bed, and again at midnight, and then it crowed long in the hours before daybreak and was wide awake at morning. Not all could sleep at night for this bird. Many a night, when the skald had gone to the outhouse to rub salt in the hero's face, his wife lay awake in bed, unable to close an eye for the crowing of the thrall's cock.

Then one night when it was still dark, and the cock had long been crowing and Thormod was in the outhouse, Thordis of Ögur wearied of getting no sleep for this bird. She put on her slippers, wrapped a cloak about her and sped out of her and Thormod's bedchamber. She went straight out to the loft where Kolbak slept, lit his oil-lamp and woke him.

He sat up in the bed and asked her will.

'I am come, Kolbak,' said she, 'on purpose to throttle that bird, that plagues us every night with his crowing.'

He said: 'That bird shall no longer crow its life away. I will wring its neck with my own hands, if you please.'

And when she had opened her errand to the thrall, and he had shown his goodwill, she remained sitting on the edge of his bed and wept.

The thrall asked why she was in such grief.

'So inordinate,' said she, 'is my love to my husband Thormod that it gives me no peace night or day. I am never so busy but that I run to sit at his feet when I hear his voice afar off. You, Kolbak, that in Ireland have seen carved crosses rising above the hill-tops, what remedy do you know to free me of this affliction, and him from chains?'

'Many years are gone by,' said Kolbak, 'since I asked you for a night's bliss, before Thormod should ride to Ögur with his kinsfolk and marry you; but you said no, and you said it was less for love of him than for the contract between you. You said that the stamp of a good woman was not to love her betrothed, but to favour none but him.'

'Now I come to you,' said she, 'not because I am his after men's law, but because I love him above all things, created or uncreated, on the Earth or under it.'

'Speak, mistress,' said he. 'I am your thrall.'

'Here at Ögur we enjoy more happiness and plenty than most in the Westfjords, as though the gods had come down to us one morning and let their eyes dwell on all around, in air, earth and sea. Milk and honey flow into the mouths of beast and man. It is no wonder my daughters are starry bright, when their father towers up to heaven above all other men like a young stag wet with dew, supple and slim, the delight of all eyes, so that even in his youth when he was a viking at Horn few denied him justice, and the women of the west saw no other man. Tell me, Kolbak, you that are Irish, what evil can Josmac Dé have in mind, to bestow such bliss on a woman?'

Kolbak replied: 'Most are like to say, mistress, that good as your husband is in himself, yet he owes most to your love-gifts.'

'That is stuff and nonsense,' said she, 'and I am surprised you should be so stupid, Kolbak, as not to know woman's arms are to a skald and hero both dungeon and snakepit. I am the bane of glory to hero and skald, the mild fetter that was forged for the wolf out of the cat's tread, the fish's breath and the bird's spittle. I am the wall cutting off the skald from enticing voyages and the clamour of fight, the favour of kings and the fame that never dies.'

Kolbak said: 'Would you have me, mistress, one morning when he has gone to rest, take the head from the outhouse and bury it deep in the ground?'

'No,' said she.

He asked why she would not.

'Because,' said she, 'however deep and secretly we may dig, that ugly and useless head will dwell next his heart and rule over other heads, not only my head and those of other women men desire most, but even the head of the evil woman that lives in the darkness of the Underworld; and the head will mount higher in his mind's eye, the deeper we dig in the ground.'

'What then shall we do?' said the thrall.

'I am so burdened with Thormod's grief,' said she, 'that I would give all to release him from me.'

Kolbak was long silent at this answer, till the bird woke up and began crowing in its pen under the roof. There was a little shutter across it, and when the bird had been crowing a while, the thrall said:

'Do after your thought, mistress, draw the little shutter from the pen, and there you will find the bird you hate and wish dead. And I say no more than that.'

When the mistress sought her bed again in the dawn, her husband had come back and was lying awake. She looked to him pale and tear-stained, and he asked where she had been all this while. She crept under the quilt, she was shivering and fighting with sleep, but answered him with a yawn:

'I have silenced that bird,' said she, 'that for ever kept us awake at night.'

With that she lay down and at once fell asleep, but it was long before he could take his eyes from her. Her fair hair was darker than of old, the white bosom higher. Was this the woman who once awakened him with the roar of her wings in an unknown fjord, came to his bedchamber with her swanskin over her arm, and touched the skald with her staff and bade him follow her, she that surpassed all other women? Or who was this woman that shrank up in his bed shuddering with the chill of dawn, and straightway slept, with an undeciphered, half-dried tear in her eye?

The same day Thormod skald went up to the loft, where the thrall had his workshop, and a corner-bed under the roof. He was handy at most crafts, and in the loft-room were all his tools and the things he was busy on, platters and bowls, baskets and churns, ladles and drinking-horns and much besides for the house. The thrall was on his knees joining the staves for a tub. He had raised the staves and was fitting the hoops round them.

Thormod examined some half-made things in silence and then sat down on a block of wood. He had his axe on a thong over his shoulder, and this he was not wont to carry at home. He loosed the axe from the thong and studied its edge a while. The thrall watched him with his squint eyes, that were uneasy to follow.

The yeoman broke silence thus: 'You have a bird that keeps your mistress and me awake at nights. He that rears such a creature is our unfriend. Take weapons in hand and let us go out on the green and fight.'

Kolbak struck his hands against the loosely joined tub in front of him, so that the staves fell out in a heap on the floor. Then he stood up.

Kolbak thrall said: 'Once long ago I was brought to lie in wait for you with weapons, and that is the act I have repented most; for indeed I learnt in Ireland that none put their faith in steel but men of faint heart. But you shall know, master, that my life has seldom been less precious to me than now, and I do not beg favour if you choose to kill me.'

Then he took a chopping-block and set it at Thormod Coalbrowsskald's feet, and lay down on the floor with the block under his head, his neck bare and his chin aloft.

'I have heard tell,' said he, 'that thus Thorgeir Havarsson was killed, and the fate of the hero is good enough for me.'

Thormod flung the axe from him and told Kolbak to stand up, he was not minded to take his head.

'I have heads enough for now,' said he.

The thrall slowly rose from the chopping-block and said no more, but turned to again where he had left off, raising the staves and fitting them together within the hoops to make the tub stand. Thormod sat and looked on for a while without a word. At last he got up.

'It may be,' said he, 'that your thought is sooth, and that thralls will inherit this land when we heroes and skald are fallen into oblivion, and that my children will learn of you that only cravens put faith in steel. But if the wisdom of you Irish is to prevail in the world, then I had rather be dead.'

And when Thormod Coalbrowsskald had said this, he went down from the loft-room, and he and the thrall had no further speech.

★ 38 ★

Now that winter passed with no further tidings, but that Thormod grew ever more withdrawn, and none knew the cause. He commonly went to rest before others that winter, and had fallen asleep when his wife came to bed. But many a night, when the house was silent and most folk sleeping, the yeoman dressed himself and went out; he betook himself to the outhouse where he treasured the ugly head, and to which he alone had a key. There he

sat the night long, strewing salt in the head's nose and mouth and speaking words to it that none other heard. He never talked of this head, nor of how he meant to bestow it, whether he would inter it in hallowed earth or lay it in mound and cairn ; and none offered to question him.

For divers causes, grief was thought to be weighing on the mistress of Ögur ; but none could tell what was her distress. Of a morning she skimmed the milk, pale and pined, and went with heavy tears to her loom of a day ; and folk wondered at her sadness the more, when towards spring it grew daily plainer that she carried new life.

One night late in the winter, it befell that Thormod Coalbrowsskald had gone out to converse with his oath-brother Thorgeir Havarsson's head ; and when he returned to the bedchamber earlier than his wont, the marriage bed was empty and cold. He lay down in bed, but could get no sleep ; and when he had lain a long time, the mistress came in, thrust off her shoes, dropped her cloak and slipped under the quilt. Both lay awake for a while, apart and without words. He could hear that she was crying quietly. He began to speak.

'Are you treading heavy paths, mistress?' said he.

She replied : 'Only those that come of my love for you, but that is now greater than I can bear without losing health and wits.'

'Strange paths, mistress,' said he, 'and yet stranger your love to me, if it be true that you have conceived since Yule ; for the last time you opened your womb to me was the night before my oath-brother Thorgeir's head stood here by the gate at hay-making ; you should be closer to your delivery if the fruit were my work.'

'Since I saw you playing on the ice and you came to us women and spoke with us, I have not lived one hour, night or day, that your image was not carved in my thoughts ; your whole being was my food ; and every hour you were too far off for the sound of your shoes to reach me, it was night in my heart. Great was the pang I suffered when you left me alone to go aviking with Thorgeir and were held

captive by the evil woman whose home is the Underworld, but far sorer has it been this last winter to know you helpless in the fetters of my desire, far from your fate and renown.'

He said: 'Brynhild Budli's daughter averred that it is more prudent not to put faith in women, for they break all their vows, and no man can truly know when a woman loves him with her whole heart. All their oaths are vanity, bubbles and hollow words.'

She said: 'We women have most to lose, and therefore we never dare love you heroes and skalds with a whole heart, for when we least think of it you are gone from our arms, to raise kings to empire and in far countries do deeds that will live while the World stands, and have played us false.'

Thormod said: 'The proof of my love to you, mistress, is that I turned aside from my fame to become a yeoman; it is long since high thought and speech have been far enough from me, and the doings that are worth a song. For so great the love I bore you, that I was at pains to have a hand in nothing you would like ill, and besides it was as though the pang must be unendurable, if by any means I laid waste the bliss you gave me, or had the fancy to seek another lot. And you have also given me daughters; that made me fearful enough at first, for I thought if your love made me mild, theirs would make me weak, and so it was, when they lay on your breast and I saw their toes wriggling as they sucked; and after that, when they laughed upon me and stretched up their tiny hands, and there were small pits at every joint, it was as though the power that conquers nations and smiles at death had been lulled asleep in my heart, till I saw my oath-brother Thorgeir Havarsson's head in the gateway.'

And when Thormod and Thordis had spoken long together in the morning twilight, and said all their say, they left talking and went to sleep.

Now the time drew near for Thordis Katlasdaughter to be delivered; and when her hour was come she brought forth a boy, comely and well made; his hair was like fire and his

eyes squint. Thormod Coalbrowsskald went up and looked at the boy, and after eycing him a long time, he greeted him, bidding him welcome to be a lord of lands, Iceland as well as Ireland, and spoke a verse on the greatest tidings that were then in the World: King Brian had fallen at Clontarf, but had kept the field; and then he laughed and said nothing more at that time, but went away. Then women were set to mind the boy.

Most have it to say, that Thormod Coalbrowsskald went to bed like the rest at Ögur when evening came. But when he had lain a while and judged others to be asleep, and the warmth of the bed promised sweet dreams, then he sat up and got out of bed, crept into his clothes, pulled on heavy shoes, flung a thick frieze cloak around him, and took his weapons and went out. Summer was waning and the night dark, but the yeoman knew the stepping-stones in the river and made for the fells.

Next morning when the household awoke, the master was not in his bed, nor anywhere about the farm. The day went by, and he was still absent, and none knew what had become of him. More days went by, and nothing was heard of Thormod yeoman. But when they went into his outhouse across the courtyard, they saw Thorgeir Havarsson's skull on a shelf, polished with much art, a great rarity. Later they had much sport from this head in Isafjord Deep, and the time when clerks should sing over it was put off; for three full generations the head went along with Ögur, but it was lost when the buildings went up in flames at the end of Markus Skeggdason's judgeship.

In Greenland is said to have been one of the smallest nations and empires of the World. Here Northern men from Iceland were settled for twelve generations, till all of them had died out, and the last man fell on his face and gave up the ghost with none to bury him. It was then close upon a hundred years since they had seen their last ship.

When Thormod Coalbrowsskald came to Greenland seeking vengeance for his oath-brother Thorgeir Havarsson, Northmen had been living there for a generation, and the land's plenty was as yet little wasted to what it became, and ships called there most years. The colony was divided into east and west.

It is said that when Thormod came to the East Pale, he sought out the man who was greatest in these fjords, by name Thorgrim Troll; for newcomers were wont to go to the chief who had most to say in the pale. The folk there were somewhat taken aback that a famous man should have come from Iceland, leaving a home and rich blessings in Isafjord Deep, to land at Brattahlid like a castaway seaman with only the clothes he wore and paltry weapons, on purpose to hunt down a couple of wretches who had drifted hither from Iceland a few months before, the cowsucker Butraldi Brusason and his bosom friend Louse-Oddi, and would not be easy till he had killed these two ragamuffins.

It is related that the Northmen in Greenland were not much for killing, unless when they sallied out to slaughter the trolls that lived at the World's end, and whom they called Scroyles. They thought they were few enough without killing each other. Often they felt a dread of getting the worse, if the trolls made a push at them.

Thorgrim Troll said he was indeed the man best informed on who came and went, setting aside the bishop at Gard, nor was it to be denied that two mean fellows had come from Iceland, helped on their way by Vermund of Vatnsfjord.

But truly these men did not look as though they could do us Greenlanders any fatal mischief, and least of all were they such stalwarts and champions that we can make out why good yeomen of Iceland should leave wealth and bliss to chase after them to Greenland.'

Thormod replied: 'We too should have been better pleased to deal vengeance on worthy folk and champions, or men that had felled my brother in fight; and it is a misfortune beyond the reach of words, that the champion should have been killed by scum as he lay asleep. But if all were so slippery in dodging their brother's claims, and honest folk shut their eyes to misrule or injustice unless good yeomen who paid the Aldething tax or other men of worth and pillars of the commonwealth had committed it, then malefactors and cowards would raise their heads in the North, skalds would lack matter, and crofters and such as have few folk, countenance and security; then it would be as though kingdoms were governed by dumb cattle and not by men.'

Thormod Coalbrowsskald held little communion with small folk in Greenland, and the great were niggardly of their help; and indeed he neglected those summer tasks that were all men's business there. The Greenlanders rose early and lay down late, so as to get the hay in without much cutting iron; some mowed the grass with their knives or tore it up with their fists; others kept vigil by little patches of corn, spreading fricze over the ears against night frost; some drove fish into a cove and took them with their hands, or chased seal with sticks. And when the foremen asked Thormod how he would choose to be employed on Thorgrim Troll's farm, he said he was here to do famous deeds and not to trouble himself about a livelihood, and on that account many in the East Pale sickened of him. The foremen said it was law in Greenland that if a man would

not work, neither should he eat, and that here folk were more concerned to get their bread than to do heroic deeds or listen to doggerel; and illwill appeared in men's talk with the skald, and none bade him to the house.

By ceaseless asking after Butraldi and Louse-Oddi, he learnt that these two vagrants had not gone down with the Greenlanders, and had found nowhere to settle; indeed they were fonder of going from door to door than of a day's work; so in spring they had been carried over to the West Pale, where life was harder and beggars died quicker than in the east. But when Thormod had learnt what was needful to the matter oftenest on his lips, satisfaction for Thorgeir, he would change his discourse and ask if in Greenland there were to be found a woman grander than other women, sent into banishment by Vermund of Vatnsfjord along with a shaggy thrall from Norway. But when they asked him how this woman was called, he had forgotten her name.

Thormod has related of his first winter in Greenland that he knew want and sickness in the East Pale, and the evil days which had to be borne most years in that country, when dearth set in at the end of winter, and there were fewer of the things needful to support life. The cold bit and ravened, and there was little fuel, beasts dried up for want of hay, the sheep toppled over as they were seeking food on the frozen ground, and cows could not get up in the byre; folk had nothing to live on but stale broth, unless they provided themselves with fish; but their tackle was insufficient, and the sea frozen some way out, and they had not clothes or gear for lying on the ice; and so little meal was there for bread and porridge that they went looking for seeds and grains on hill and heath and chewed them to keep their strength up. Old seal-meat was their best fare, and that becomes wearisome if it must be eaten dry. Most grew lean and sick in these evil winter days, and in bad years many died with their sheep. Nor was there drinking of Yule in Greenland, but all the more fervent prayer to the blessed Nicholas of Bari, the man of God in whom the Greenlanders put most faith, now that Thor was gone. The church at

Gard had been hallowed to Nicholas by command of the Lord Pope.

In Greenland it is never before the last that the ice breaks, the fjords empty and sea journeys can begin; yet at last it happens. And in spring Thormod joined company with some that meant to remove to the West Pale. Between the two pales in Greenland was six days' rowing for a boat of six oars. They had contrary winds and tossed about through much of the summer between land and isles, and had to live on the fish they caught, and came to the West Pale only at the end of haymaking. Here were fewer folk and yet worse days than in the east. Bare cliffs lowered over the sea, and fjords cut deep in among the glaciers, where not a blade grew, so that in this pale they had yet greater need for the blessed Nicholas of Bari than in the other, and had indeed built him churches under the snowfields at the behest of the venerable Lord Pope. But when Thormod Coalbrowsskald asked after Butraldi and Louse-Oddi, he learnt that those vagabonds had joined company with hunters that went off to Northseat in spring to kill walrus and whale, whose teeth, next to gold and ivory, are the best merchandise the World knows.

Northseat was what the Greenlanders called those regions that lie nearest Ginnungagap, where is nothing but ice and darkness, and where the frost-giants live. To those parts of Northseat that were handiest to the settlements it was a month's rowing all but five days. Men commonly went there in spring and returned in autumn, but some tarried a winter in the north to make themselves rich, and some several; these journeys were full of hazard, and some never returned; indeed the voyage to Northseat was thought an undertaking only for reckless folk of those in such poverty that they had not bread to eat. But if a man could get home from Northseat, his prosperity was assured.

We find in tales, that due north of Northseat lived the nation of trolls and wizards that the Greenlanders called Scroyles, because they dressed themselves in garbage and skins, which Northmen thought it shameful to wear. Nor

did they reckon the Scroyles among mankind, but declared their lives forfeit, since it is mockery of right human beings for monsters to put on human shape, with eyes, nose, and other likeness of men. These scum, as the Greenlanders called them, were wont to move eastward in summer, pitch tents on islands and rocks, and fense whales and other great sea-fish. And whenever their landing was bruited, the Northern chiefs called to arms and set on these beings and killed them. The Northmen were not long in learning the Scroyles' magic to be so powerful that they were never in peril of their lives by sea or land. They called all weathers fair, and were never more at ease than in howling storms, in which Northmen die of cold or perish at sea. This folk always had abundance, whether in good or bad seasons, waddled with fat and were eating and drinking together while all went wrong for shrewd Northmen, that had a name as farmers, and hunger and want threatened their townlands, sheep succumbed and land was laid waste, and children died in the womb. And when the air blackened with piercing winds, heavy snows and hard frost, the troll-folk made themselves snug within blocks of snow, and beguiled their time with singing the Moonman's Song forwards and backwards, night and day, never heeding whether the tempest were long or short. But to the Northmen it seemed strangest of all that these folk had no weapons, and had not acquired the art of killing and murdering, but let themselves be wiped out and their tents go up in flames unless they could save themselves by witchcraft.

Thormod now found that his lot was to be always missing Thorgeir Havarsson's slayers, and that it would be harder than ever to come up with them. And when he heard this, and it appeared there was no means of going north that summer, he broached other matters and finished by asking whether any had heard tell of a woman bigger and stronger than other women in the West Pale, yet more limber and wanton in love-play, who had been sent from the Westfjords to Greenland by Vermund the chief. The Greenlanders said they knew of no such notable wife as Thormod described,

but an old woman from Iceland lived out on a ness near the seals' breeding-grounds, boiling down whale-oil that had to be paid yearly to the bishop of Gard, with a crooked and ugly fellow as her servant. She bore a stranger name than most other women, for she was named Sigurfljord, and her man she called goodman Shaghair, but often Shaghair thrall, and beauty and grace were not their merits.

For days and weeks Thormod wandered about Anavik in the West Pale, sad and at a loss, and once again little sought after by the better folk of the townland, and long sick of neglect and wretched fare. He had much to brood on that was hidden from others, and thus delayed in making his way to the ness, to the woman that was said to live there. Daily he took long walks by the sea or sat on rocks on the shore, watching the seals drop their young on the skerries, or taking auspices from the screaming of the gulls. And every day he saw smoke rising from cliffs at the far end of the headland across the fjord. Daily he went a good deal further along the fjord than yesterday before turning back; one morning he had set off betimes, and towards noon came to the head of the fjord. A crofter gave him a drink of goat's milk, and he sat long on the fence, considering which way he should return. And the end was that he went along the other side of the fjord in the cold shadow of the glacier towards the ness, unthinking, deep in a dream. When he came out on the headland at evening, the sun shone in his face. White smoke rose under the sun, and the wind carried a stench of whale-oil to his nostrils. And now he determined not to turn back.

Among naked rocks a man sat by a fireplace of stones with two pots on it; in one liver was boiling, in the other blubber, and he was feeding the fire with seaweed and small driftwood. For many years this man had done nothing to beard or hair, but the eyes sparkling under his bushy brows were keen as a hawk's. His sharp knife spotted with blood and blubber lay on the edge of the fireplace.

Thormod skald greeted the man by the pots, undid his sword, laid it opposite the knife and flung himself down on

the pebbles, for he was spent with walking. The old man never lifted his eyes from his work.

Thormod asked: 'Who is now the man Coalbrow loves most of all?'

Then the gaffer looked up, his eyes flashing under the heavy brows.

'You will learn soon enough.'

'When?' asked Thormod.

'On that day,' said the gaffer, 'when your heart is pierced by the weapon of him she loves next to you. But what are you doing in this sink-hole of the world, you changeling?'

'Seeking fame,' said Thormod.

'I never knew men sought fame in Greenland,' said the gaffer. 'Whom do you mean to kill?'

'Butraldi,' said Thormod, 'and the rascal that follows him.'

The old man laughed and said: 'So you mean to strike down the wisest champion and greatest well-pisser born in Iceland? But to be sure he will have the upper hand of you,' as of all his enemies. At Hornstrands and in Isafjord Deep he got all good things he chose to demand, and could fill himself with marrow and fat. Here most years are starvation to man and beast, and Butraldi and Louse-Oddi soon saw that in a little while men from the North would die out on this fishing-ground, and that idlers had nothing great to expect. But under the glaciers of the far north are folk living in such plenty that they stick seal-blubber into the mouths of the new-born, and of corpses laid out for the birds. Butraldi and Louse-Oddi are gone to Northscat to live with these folk.'

Near by in the lee of a beetling rock was a hut of stones caulked with seaweed, and the doorposts were whalebone. And when they had been talking a while, gaffer and guest, the hut opened, and out of the low opening crawled a woman in a bear-skin. This woman was not only large-framed, but also higher of bosom and far ampler in the belly and loins than other women; her brows were like coal but her hair wolf-grey; she was thick-necked, with strong teeth, her eyes wondrous large. She was kilted up under the bearskin, and

her calves were swollen and her knees huger than those of common folk, and the sight of this woman made all clear that olden tales have to say of witches and troll-women dwelling on the north capes, where castaways are washed up after the wreck of their ships; but this woman was no sooner out of the door than she made straight for the fireplace and took both weapons, the gaffer's knife and the guest's sword, each from its stone, and fastened them to her belt under the bearskin.

Thormod got up and greeted the woman; she asked what news and who he might be, and how it was that so young and handsome a man had not ordered his beard in more courtly fashion before showing himself to a woman?

He called himself Vigfus¹ and said he was not in Greenland to have his beard trimmed or his hair smoothed.

'I was born and bred in Iceland at Isafjord Deep, and Butraldi Brusason and his follower Louse-Oddi have killed my brother, and I would not spare to pursue when I heard they had fled here. My intent is to hunt them down here in Greenland and kill them.'

At these words the housewife set up a roar of laughter, so that the cliff echoed and the seals woke up on the rocks. And when the woman had done laughing, she turned to the old man, who was still bent over the fireplace, and said:

'Now take yourself off, Shaghair thrall, for I would speak alone with this guest.'

The thrall walked off in silence, broad-shouldered, a stooping champion; but Thormod Coalbrowsskald went up to the woman and kissed her. Mistress Sigurfljod began:

'Henceforth you have no need of disguise. That woman is indeed gone for ever, who once took up into her bed a little lad who was to sleep with the dogs; yet I always looked for you to come in the end, though there might be only my cairn to bid you welcome here on the ness. How could you forget me so long?'

¹ 'Eager to Kill.'

He said: 'Never a night have I lain down to sleep, and never a morning awakened but I heard your bird on the roof.'

'We women like to hear pretty speeches from you men,' said she, 'and most when we are growing old and fat; and indeed we had joy together once, though I was no beauteous woman.'

'You were the woman,' said he, 'that always hindered me from loving another. Though I pledged myself to the fairest valkyrie, we had no joy in each other's love, for your image stood between her and me.'

'It is untried,' said she, 'whether the woman you find here has the honey-mark that might yet inspire a judge to song.'

'I was called the greatest yeoman in Isafjord Deep,' said he, 'by my side stood a woman for whose wealth and beauty I was the envied of most good men in the west. But one high summer, when the sun of life was laughing clearest in heaven, and there was a fruitful reek from the earth, I could find no peace till I had bidden my men row me out to Snœfellsstrand, staying only in the darkest and gloomiest of the Jökulfjords. There I sat on a grassgrown wall, listening to the beck that in the old days ran by your house. Year after year, when summer was at the highest, I sought the cold fjord under the dark cliffs, where I had moaned sick in your arms those dark winter nights.'

'I charged you and Thorgeir,' said she, 'on the first day of your coming, to kill my paramour, and no women can do more for their husbands.'

Thormod said: 'I am father to two little maids with the fairest eyes and the softest hair in Strands or Isafjord Deep; never can I forget their small toes, as they lay on their mother's breast to drink.'

The housewife said: 'My days would have been less of a burden to me when old Vermund, my former friend, banished me to Greenland, if a son had been granted us. And you shall know, that if I had loved myself more than you I would never have let you go your way from the Jökulfjords to Isafjord Deep. I had the power to give you the full joy

of love and the might that goes with it, that day when I let another woman have you.'

'She loved me no less than you,' said he. 'You charged me to kill your lover, but she sought her thrall's bed in the night, so that I might pull on my shoes and depart to the freedom that makes heroes and skalds.'

★ 40 ★

It has always been in dispute how long Thormod dwelt in Greenland; some would have it that he was there seven half-years, others say three winters. No judgment shall be given in these pages; but it shall be said that years are not less deceitful than hours to measure a man's love-commerce with a woman he has been following after a great while, and has found at last. Maybe some learned men reckon seven half-years' cohabitation with a woman as no longer than three winters would seem to others. But on this most books are at one, that it was a decrepit greybeard who was finally rescued out of Greenland, whether his stay had been long or short.

It is told that at the beginning of his time on the ness there were some Greenland days to his mind, unlike as they were to the life he had once known, and tardy as were the famous deeds he had had so long at heart. It is told also that mistress Sigurfljod left little undone to distract her guest from the stink of oil-trying on the ness with its stoves, cauldrons and kegs. On his coming the housewife got out her napkins and cloths and made them into hangings and bedcurtains, and led her guest to the high-seat of sea-scoured whale-spine, and set carved runic pillars on either hand. She had fireplaces built on the floor for heating bathwater. And when it was bedtime she spoke roughly to Shaghair thrall,

and bade him settle himself among his oil-casks or in the sheds hung with whale's belly and fish, or if he were not content with that he could stretch himself on the piles of stone where lay rotting birds and fermenting shark. And when winter came, it seemed to the guest only proper that Shaghair thrall, who contained heroism and skaldship, should rise at nightfall from his seat by the doorpost, and lug his sheepskin into a shed to sleep among fish and whale.

But after a while Thormod contracted the sickness that comes from lack of spoon meat, which plagued most Northmen in Greenland, and increased and flourished on breadless fare, since they had not even bread of unthreshed corn; and when they used wild corn or ate porridge with sand in it their teeth were spoilt, they fell into a prolonged sickness of the bowels and grew weak and thin and wasted away. By this it appears how much mistress Sigurfljod knew, and how expert she was in runic lore, that Thormod grew more enthralled by her wondrous talk the longer he stayed with her, and her secret lore in dark Greenland seemed to him all but full amends for the rich blessing he had enjoyed as luck's esquire in the light of Isafjord Deep.

Of mistress Sigurfljod it is to be said, that in Greenland she was too questionable a figure to be reckoned among women of standing, for she bore herself like a witch and went wrapped in skins, as troll-women do; it was known also that she had been banished from many lands for scathe to her menfolk, to be swept in at last with the trying-cauldrons on this ness. But though she had to do without most things men desire for their comfort, and had no clothes such as Northwomen in Greenland made of wool, yet it was no secret there that she had converted her and her thrall's toil into costly goods, meaning one day to take ship for Norway and see the haunts of her youth.

It may be read in holy books that the man chained to a spot by his flesh, and seeing all about him apple-orchards and roses, will some day, when he goes walking there, find the garden changed to a burning desert, with neither water nor shade to refresh the weary, such a waste that not even

a snow-bunting can get a blade in its beak. But whether this insight comes by degrees, or is one day suddenly revealed on the spot, shall not be discussed in this book.

The short summers of Greenland seemed to dwindle or come no more; and the yeoman that once lived in Isafjörð Deep, where fortune blooms, heard his voice asking in Anavik, among barren rocks where no flower would ever spring: 'Wherefore am I here?'

One morning he opened his eyes in the housewife's bed, and saw by his side a monster bigger and more bloated than any other creature in woman's form; still half asleep, he thought he had gone astray on obscure paths in a quagmire; before him was no road to the homes of men, far less of kings, behind him all ships were burned. On the brink of the abyss, his thoughts turned to far-off places, where kings were dispensing fame, and as he got up these words escaped him:

'What will King Olaf say to his skalds today?'

She awoke and asked: 'What is that to you?'

'May not the king be wondering that I do not keep faith?' said he. 'Thorgeir is unavenged and my song of hero and king at a stand.'

'Then are you weary of my being all to you, Thorgeir's revenge and king's praise?' said she.

He replied: 'Every night now I lie down sorrowful, knowing it is for you I leave that unregarded which is the duty of man, and is named in the old saw: speech of Thing and king.'

'What can stupid kings and their trashy gifts do for you,' said she, 'or squalling of clowns at the Thing?'

'We skalds may never forget for one day,' said he, 'that heroes make kings, and kings have the rule of lands.'

'Have I not ruled for you, skald?' said she.

'Unavenged lies my oath-brother Thorgeir, rule as you may, and shabby is what you own and rule, while so needful a task is undone. I can never approach King Olaf Haraldsson with my head up, till my work is accomplished.'

'You will gain little by letting that king feed you to dogs

and ravens, rather than live in the kingdom which is mine,' said she.

'I have gained little by forsaking that woman in Iceland who had more of the sun's hue than other woman, and my small daughters that I called Moon and Star, if I am to end my days in an oily hut on a rock feeding on fox and seaweed. Ill is a deedless life, yet a nameless death is worse, and I will spare nothing to find Thorgeir's slayers and take their lives, and then in a king's service meet a death worthy of the skald, when my fate calls.'

She said: 'I have a greater and better kingdom in Norway than Olaf Haraldsson.'

'What kingdom?' said he.

'A kingdom warded by a yet greater array of finer champions, to fight for me when I will.'

'It is news to me,' said he, 'that you have any other array of champions to fight for you than Shaghair thrall.'

'In my bed are three twisted narwhal's teeth,' said she, 'and I meant two of them to carry Shaghair and me to Norway; with the third I would have bought us a dwelling-place in the Fjords, where I was born. There in dreams I have seen a hall in the heather. True it is that my thrall Shaghair is the man who has cleaved to me longest in steadfast love, and I am surer of his service and patience the worse woman I am to him, and he is most willing when I use him the worst. In brief, I have had no better man than he and never shall have. Now, Thormod, it is at your choice to go out and kill Shaghair thrall, and I will give you a weapon. Then both of us, you and I, will go home to Norway, and there you shall learn what pillars bear up my highseat in the heather. Then my magic shall be your gain and make you the most famous chief in the North.'

He said: 'I do not desire what is won by magic, but only what I attain through zeal and skill. Rather would I fall in battle for a king ruling folk and realm, than conquer by magic or other abomination anywhere.'

She said: 'That king I will surely strike down, and you shall attain only what I buy you; true it is that I am no

shield-maid of the sort you can put to kitchen work ; I am indeed the woman whose home is the Underworld ; of all your bright shield-maids I make widows, and fell the kings in whom you had greatest faith. And though you fare to the World's end, me alone you find there.'

And the woman was somewhat melancholy that day. At night she called Shaghair thrall and bade him lie in the house with them.

Next morning when Thormod rose and went out, on the fireplace before the door he saw two weapons, his own sword and Shaghair thrall's knife, that mistress Sigurfljod had tucked under her skirt when time was. Without a word Thormod Coalbrowsskald took his sword from the fireplace and went away.

★ 41 ★

Now we are to speak somewhat more of the folk named Innuit, that have their haunts in Greenland up the most northerly of the fjords and on nesses, islands and rocks. But so soon as the land begins to rise up from the scabeach in that country, there are high glaciers ; some say they continue northward to frozen Scythia, and here is no human life. It is said that the designation this folk has given itself comes to the same as what we call men. Innuit are some of the most peaceable and happiest men that are named in books. They have no stock and no husbandry with tillage or haymaking, but are such great hunters as never to miss their mark. They take white bears in pitfalls of stone, and drive reindeer into a pen and there slaughter them, or into the sea and shoot them from boats with harpoons. These beasts they hunt especially for the hide, and the tongue and sirloin. They hunt seabirds with

darts, and fish they drive into shallow water and kill them with fishing-spears. They drive dogs on the sea-ice; and when they come to a hole they lay rotten fish-swims and seal-liver on the edge, and when a shark snatches at the bait they stick it with spears. They dress in skins, which to Northmen is shameful and fit for trolls, and have bird-skins next their body. They use one-man boats, that the Northmen called keiplar, made with so potent an art that neither skerry nor storm can hurt them; they have also skin boats, that are rowed by women in skin breeches, and it is likewise unknown for one of these boats to run aground or go to the bottom. And therefore a byword has it that Innuits are unskilled in drowning at sea. It is said that though the weather is harder in that country than in any other we have accounts of, Innuits call all weathers fair, and that weather best that for the time has been sent them. The frost in that land is biting, yet none freeze to death; the storms are lengthy, with driving snow, and all is icebound, yet we have not heard that ever one of these folk was lost in a storm. Earth is not reckoned among them as an element, but fire they call their staunch friend, next to the gods they have most faith in: the Man that rules over the Moon, and the Mother of Seabeasts, who rules in the ocean and has but one arm.

It is believed that though Innuits are mighty hunters and trappers, they can scarce see human blood without tears; they find it hard to conceive what forces and instincts drive other nations to manslaughter, and are ignorant of the tools murderous folk use for it in other lands. Innuits have thick black hair, and their mouths are not narrow. But when hunters who had been further south described the ways of these Northmen that were come to Greenland, and when the Northmen killed their first Innuite, this folk fell into sore amazement at such monstrous and singular doings, and named the Northmen after the act that seemed to define them best, calling them murder-men or man-killers as distinct from men, Innuits. And as Innuits knew nothing of

bloody feud, so they knew nothing of vengeance and other amends that belong to justice.

The Northmen felt themselves called on to attack Innuits wherever they found them, whether they heard of a troop or met them singly; and if they came on their houses or tents of skin on an island or ness, they burnt down these settlements or destroyed them some other way and slaughtered all born of woman. And since the Northmen were light of skin, their hair colourless and their eyes shining clear, Innuits gave them a nickname, calling them the white or wan murder-men and the pale murder-wolves.

Innuits do not live together in pairs, but get their subsistence in hunting fellowships. Each spring they move south in bands for the fishing, seldom lingering in one place, and returning northward when summer is on the wane but the places where they have pitched their tents for a while, they call cooking-places.

Now it came about that when Northmen had just burnt a cooking-place to ashes and killed all that had not hidden themselves in clefts of rock and smashed the fishing-gear to their power, they ran into a great storm, and then it befell, as it never befalls Innuits, that their boat capsized off a ness. And since the Northmen in Greenland could not save their lives by swimming, all on board perished excepting one man, who was from Iceland, the skald Thormod Bessason. He was a good swimmer and kept afloat for a time, till a wave washed him up on a bank of seaweed, where he could do nothing to help himself but shout.

Presently the storm died down. Those that were left of the hunting-group the Northmen had harried now fled with some dogs to find safer haunts, using boats the Northmen had missed when they were firing the place. And as the women rowed by the ness, they could hear yells from the bank of seaweed. There Innuits found Thormod skald at death's door from cold and wet. His good leg was broken. As Innuits knew no justice, they saved their enemy Thormod skald from death and sought to knit up the leg with song. They gave him warm seal-blood to drink, and

rotten bird with the feathers on, and set dogs to sleep on him. Many dead men of those that had been Thormod skald's fellows had also drifted into the seaweed, and Innuits put seal-blubber in their mouths and then carried the bodies up the rocks. But though these folk had more goodness of heart than wit or learning, yet they were not blind to the danger that threatens when men have a pale murder-wolf in their midst, and though he were sick and spent they looked for him to rise up and kill them when he got his health back. And at each night's halting-place they put him to lie among the dogs, watched over by the men who had charge of these beasts. But when night fell the dogs barked mightily, and some bit fiercely, and there was little cheer in these places. Thormod saw he had no choice but either to go along with his hosts, no matter how far astray, or be left behind alone, a doomed man, irretrievably lost in this desolation. Summer was near its end. They struck their tents, and carried all their things to the women's boats, with newborn children and dogs; but the men that were fit for anything went each in his kayak. They spun their kayaks and kept them keel up to show their love to the women, and that was courtesy.

Thormod had seen nothing to match these folk's dawdling at the start of a long journey. They took no heed of the hours; all moved leisurely, not unlike the folk who sometimes appear in dreams; none were in haste, and none hurried them. Thormod grew stupid with seeing men loiter about their tasks as though they were child's play and not grown men's business. Often evening was at hand before the boats were launched and folk ready to make a start. Yet daily they got a little further north-east and away from the Northern townlands. But they had such short stages that when they had rowed round the furthest point of a ness and into the next fjord they thought that was enough for the day, and the women rowed ashore and took up the baggage, children, dogs and Thormod Coalbrowsskald, shoved the boats out of the water, pitched tents and boiled fish with great hullabaloo and spent the night there. Or

they would row up a fjord, close in-shore, aiming for the head of it, but camp for the night after a few strokes. These folk perpetually hugged the shore and never made straight from ness to ness; they had no knowledge of sail. And when they had come to the head of a fjord after several days' rowing, they worked their way down the other side. If they sighted quarry they would lie still at a cooking-place for a few days. At times they dragged or carried their boats with all their impedimenta over a tongue of land behind a steep hill into the next fjord. The women pitched tents on the cooking-place, using their oars as tent-poles, while some of the men hunted foxes and hares near by or tried for a scent of musk-ox, and others looked out for the creatures that live in the sea, seal, whale, walrus and bear. They had repositories of food here and there and always left whale and seal at the cooking-place to be a resource for them on the way back, or for other bands; teeth and skins they took with them, and much blubber. But when they met other bands on the road, there was great rejoicing among them, and all camped for a few days and cooked seal-blubber and sang 'a-i' and 'i-i' and made holiday.

It was great news in these hunting fellowships, when a troop that had been in the south appeared with Thormod Coalbrowsskald in their baggage. Most had never seen a pale mankiller, and some asked what this creature might be and why he was kept with the dogs. The others explained that Thormod skald was of a race of pale Innuits that acknowledged no virtue but murder, and told how pale murder-men had come to their fishing-ground in the south and killed all those they could come at, among them some that were artful dog-drivers, and women that were rare hands at cooking blubber. Then one and all blessed their luck, that the Moonman and the Mother of Seabeasts had spared them from learning any more of the pale ones than wise men could tell in song.

Thormod now lay all night with the dogs in divers places at the northern end of the World, the abode of death, and his lifedays were sad enough and the slayers of Thorgeir

Havarsson as far from his weapons as they had ever been. Then a longing many a time kept vigil in his breast, that the day might yet come, however distant to look to, when he would stand before the great king Thorgeir had served, who was now ruling the realm of Norway with honour. And though the vengeance that would give him a right to approach the king were so slippery, he yearned to nourish the king's praise with a song that should be unforgotten while ages rolled. And though vengeance were to seek, it seemed to the skald that in the king's eyes there would surely be some amends in his having ranged so far after the champion's slayers; he tried to deafen his ear to the ceaseless baying by exalting King Olaf and praising him for the champions in his train, and seeing in fancy the hour when he would come as a skald to the king's court, and enter and bow before his lord. And as he pondered all this his broken leg grew together, but awry and of little use, and he was lame of the other from the stone-slip on Ögur.

Now when they had been travelling north-east for some weeks they came into a narrow region where glaciers slid down to the sea between naked mountain-tops. The weather changed for the worse and they were often snowed in many days, yet at length came where they had their dwellings, stone huts on a ness, some cone-shaped, others covered with whalebone laths and hides stretched between; here the stay-at-homes were awaiting them, old folk and children and a legion of dogs. When they were home they carried their boats ashore, greased them carefully and hung them up on tall masts, so that the dogs could not get to gnaw them. Then they made houses, tents, sleighs and other gear ready for the winter. In winter they were accustomed to drive their dogs in the moonlight on icebound fjords, right out to the deep, and take seal, when the weather served. Here was more gorging on seal and walrus than elsewhere.

Some laid seaweed on the huts and then snow, others hung them inside with skins and set cooking-gear and lamps in them, for there was no lack of blubber and oil for fire and light. In that land the moon shines in winter but not the

sun, and therefore the Moonman is the most glorious of all. Gradually the days lost all sunlight, till a man could just see a hand before his face for about an hour at noon. By then Thormod Coalbrowsskald had won the dogs' confidence, and they, that had first been savage with him, no longer offered to tear him to pieces; and at the same time he rose in esteem with the band, they made him the foremost of dogs, ranking just under the dogs' keepers. They dressed him in good jackets and hose of sealskin and gave him skins to sleep in and a place in a shed for pregnant bitches and sick old dogs that were so sagacious and true that none had the heart to kill them. Lusty dogs were put in a snow-shelter or left to be snowed in on open ground; they were tied together with ropes of seaweed, for that was the only rope they would not bite through. And when it had snowed and stormed for days and nights, the men had to dig their beasts out of the snow and look after them. To be sure so noble a skald as Thormod found his days weary, when he heard nothing but the wind shrieking and the dogs baying and saw no daylight; and he would have thought himself dead and come to Niflheim, had not the beauteous image of King Olaf Haraldsson, Thorgeir's and both the oath-brothers' chief, dwelt in his mind's eye, and dreams nourished his hope of being in truth a kingsman one day.

★ 42 ★

Now Thormod Coalbrowsskald tarried in this place, well fed on seal-blubber and blood and rotten bird, which is there eaten with feathers as well as grouse with the crow; but for long he had little commerce with men, since Innuit were afraid that after the manner of his folk he would kill them, if he came near them. He was

long sick and brooked his food ill. Then one morning, when as often in Greenland a bitter wind blew, he woke up in the dog-shed, for by his couch sat a father and his daughter, beginning their minstrelsy with 'a-i' and 'i-i' and a drum ; they were come to visit him and offer him hot seal-liver, which is a great dainty among them. And when father and daughter had run the hazard of singing over a man-killer and bringing him dainties, and he had given ear to the song and eaten the titbit, the bearing of this hunting fellowship to their guest was entirely changed, and many that had heeded him no more than a puff of wind now cut him bits of their food in sign of goodwill and opened their eyes to him. At night he was brought into a hut ; this was the abode of seven families, and here thirty Innuits had their being night and day. The girl that had woken him in the morning with titbits and lively song now greeted him kindly, and bade him sit down and be merry with the others. This girl was named Luka. And that night they sang much to the drum. It now looked as though the hunters had forgiven the pale man the harm they had suffered from his folk, and when bed-time came, Thormod was not sent out as before to sleep with the dogs, but given a fine skin bag to crawl into, hemmed round and set with motley skin beads. And then the maid Luka came and crawled into the bag after him. In that country girls that are vain of their beauty use urine for washing the head and other purposes, and smear themselves thoroughly with an unguent Northmen call oil-dregs. Thormod Coalbrowsskald made no move.

But next night when the woman came to him in the bag, he turned away without greeting her ; and the third night he made himself so broad that the woman could not creep in. She went over to the wall and wept. This amazed him much. Other women went to offer her comfort, but the old men that had charge of the drum began to sing 'a-i' and 'i-i' and row with their bodies in great strokes, while others bowed their heads down on their knees as they sang. This was the drift of the song, that pale murder-wolf will not have man's daughter in his resting-place, haughty guest

scorns hunting-folk and much blubber ; now has sore grief smitten these good men, 'a-i-a'. Are you not filled with shame, when the gills quake on the stranded trout, that late swam hale in the stream with beat of tail, 'a-i-a, a-i-a'? Now all that had gone to bed rose again, each from his crib, and joined in the song in tones of pity and sore lament. At last certain men came forward and offered to lend the pale one their not yet mangiven daughters to sleep with, if he thought them better than Luka, and some were ready to lend him their wives, if these would consent ; but Luka should have the man she chose. Thormod looked at the other women, and could perceive that their smell would not be unlike maiden Luka's, and that among hunting-folk he that would not lie with a woman must lie with dogs and wake fleabitten, and he therefore thought it most prudent to go with the crowd, and said at length that it was for maiden Luka to come and sleep in the bag she had chewed with her own teeth and decorated besides with precious beads. He owned that a woman with so noble a sleeping-bag must be of much worth in a hunting fellowship. And these words gave them all great joy, and all fervently praised the Man that has made the moon his cooking-place, and some the one-armed Mother of Scabeasts. Luka came from the wall where she had stood weeping ; at first she did not look up, but dried her tears with the back of her hand, grateful that he had refused other women, and yet full of woe. And now Thormod was softened by the sight of a woman that thought her happiness worth tears ; aforetime he parted from the best women that have lived in the North, those that played with his life-egg in the Hornbjarg, and they were dry-eyed ; he said there was little force in what the nations called fragrance, that was fragrance to one which to another was stench.

'This girl shall certainly be my wife,' said he.

And now time went by.

Thormod Coalbrowsskald found much to surprise him, when he was come from the Northern townlands to this edge of the World. In the pales had been hunger and dis-

tress, of which men and beasts perished, but here, north of the limits of human life, was abundance of all that the heart desires, tools and gear, houses and boats, clothes and shoes, food in plenty and light and fire without end. There had been little song among Northmen in the south country, and their skalds were slack and poor; but here were long songs, and all were skalds; and when one struck up a refrain, the whole tribe joined in and did not leave off till night was over. In the West Pale Northmen were in constant peril by sea and land for the weather's sake, but here hard winters with long, thick snowstorms and biting frost did no hurt. Innuits sat round their soapstone pots and were never easier than when their houses were wholly buried, and there was not a sign of them in the snowfields under the ring of the moon, except when brisk men had to shovel themselves up through the roof to let the smoke out. Light burned in their lamps night and day. And in their houses under the banks of snow the heat was so great that all went naked, but for a strip of hide round their loins. Each had something to busy him, some cooking and cleaning, some cutting soapstone and making pots or carving harpoons and other spears out of bone, but for this they had no edge-tools, they scraped bone with harder bone; they had thongs instead of nails to fix things together; some prepared skins for clothing with bats, scrapers or teeth, while the women sewed bird-skins together for underclothes with whale-sinew as thread and hare's teeth as needles; there were also men who were always cold-hammering iron; but there was none in this place who coveted fame in arms or power as a chief. Yet though Thormod was here received among folk more peaceable and more sober and united than other nations, so that none jangled, but each was his neighbour's help and stay, and none caused disquiet but the man who would not hear of a woman; though this folk lived in bliss and abundance in a land where the Northmen suffered distress and death, and though they had all the arts that were needful to live well in the land, and enjoyed all the good luck that springs from blubber, far surer and kindlier than what

springs from gold, yet the strange guest set little store by all this, when he was at last living among men who had truly made their own fortune in their country. And if Thormod were minded to give a hand with this or that, he had no knack with the tool or gear used among them for such a purpose, and yet all had come so easy to him before, when he lived in Isafjord Deep. Their tongue he learnt no better than dogs that distinguish noises of human speech. And when they gathered round in a circle to sing their lays, and every child of man gave his mite, the skald shut his ears to that song, as close as he could; he thought all was pettiness in the songs of these folk that had never, to the knowledge of any, done famous deeds; but yet this seemed to him the very crown of depravity, that it never came into these men's heads what glory there is in owing allegiance to magnificent rulers and kings or other chiefs, that attain lustre by victories in the field or notable conquests, or because they have champions and skalds in their train; he thought it a singular commonwealth that had no great folk to make use of the small. And he has himself said, that in the time he sojourned among them he had but one thought night and day, that it was a great pity freeborn heroes and skalds and their kings should lack the strength to wipe out such a stupid and slavish nation.

It is said that on this cooking-place Thormod Coalbrows-skald came to have a taste for hot seal-liver. But it was taken somewhat amiss that dame Luka offered the pale man more titbits than other men of the band got from their wives, and that she fed him, when other men had to eat without help. And therefore a wise man who had the confidence of the Moonman was sent to Thormod and Luka, to let Thormod know that no wife in a hunting-clan ought to love her husband more than others did theirs. The hunters disliked it too that the pale man should be always muttering some of his black charms in his beard, while others were singing, and they wished to know the reason for it. Thormod replied that it was but right he should have more seal-liver than others, for he served Olaf Haraldsson, who was the

most glorious king in the North, and for his oath-brother's sake was that king's henchman, and sang his praise, whatever others might sing. But Innuït could make little of this talk; they were ill acquainted with land-lore and had never heard tell of kings or champions.

'Is yon Olaf a master at dog-driving?' they asked.

Now this winter passed like others, that were no shorter; there began to be rifts in the black of night, and folk that were weather-wise said the Mother of Seabeasts was breathing thaw to the land from the furthest sea, where she has her cooking-place. And when the sun drove his bright sky-dogs south over the glacier, and the Moonman, guardian of the twilight, had gone to rest, the men woke their earthly dogs, knocked the snow from their sleigh-runners, and set out to fetch the gifts laid by the one-armed woman on the brink of the ice.

Thormod was left at home, with his mind on more glorious deeds than killing of seal and walrus. But as time began to hang heavy on him, he amused himself with beguiling the women that worked indoors, while his lawful wife was out on the ice. Of these doings came discord; the women grew jealous of each other, for many were bent on lying with this wan mankiller, and the menfolk were filled with grief, to see an end of the modesty they thought women ought to observe. And it came to this, that one night dame Luka found her young sister Mamluka in the mankiller's sleeping-bag. And when Luka had found Mamluka in the sleeping-bag, she thought to chase her out of it, but Mamluka would not rise from her love, and so Luka sat down by the wall and burst into tears. Her mother went and squatted beside her and cried likewise with might and main, and then her cousins and other kinswomen, till there was huge crying, but the girl would not get up from Thormod's sleeping-bag.

It was the rule in these Northlands that men who seduced others' wives might be put to death, but as we said before, Innuït had no knowledge of killing. Yet it is believed that though Innuït never used revenge, one thing they held

unatonable and beyond all other misdeeds, which was for a man to desert his wife without cause and leave her sorrowing, and take another woman before her eyes. For this crime there was a heavier doom and harder penance than for any other that can be done in a hunting-fellowship. To mete out this fearful chastisement, they take a snow-bunting and breathe into its nostrils, and thus breathe out their ill-will at what has been done. Then they loose the bird into the malefactor's hut, and all others leave it. From that day they neither see the miscreant nor confess his presence among them. He is reckoned to be alone, and he that is alone is dead.

Now the time was at hand when they would set out on the summer fishing; it was growing lighter at night. And one evening they saw that a bird had flown into the dwelling-house, and in the anguish of its bird-heart was beating its wings against the roof. At the coming of the bird all fell silent. And then they were seized with terror, scrambled to their feet and left the house. There went Thormod's family, wife and sister-in-law and their whole kin, and those women that had been snug with the guest aforetime, and all took what they were busy with, and Thormod was left alone in the house with the bird. He sat a while, hearing the bird beat its wings on the roof, and looking for them to return; but none did. At last Thormod got up and opened, for the bird to fly where it would on those paths that the Moonman and the Mother of Seabeasts point out to birds. Then Thormod went out and cried that the bird was flown, but none heeded. By night it was light enough to work. There was much coming and going on the snow-crust around the winter houses, and it struck him that all meant to be gone that night. But when he accosted any in words he had learned of their speech, they turned a deaf ear. And when he touched a man to be noted of him, the man went away silently and without a glance, as though Thormod had been invisible. Then it was with him as with many a husband, when sweethearts fail they resort again to their wives. He went to where Luka was at

work, and asked why she had not given him to eat, but his wife neither saw nor heard him, and when he pulled at her, she was startled, as though something unclean had dropped unawares from the sky, brushed herself hastily and went and hid herself behind clance folk. None bade him get up and prepare to journey with them. And when they had gathered their belongings, they drove their sleighs and boats seaward over the ice. And as he heard the dogs' barking grow fainter, and the creak of the sleighs, he knew he was dead. Then he lay awake the night through, pondering and debating with himself by what means he could hope to return to life. In the morning when he went out, it was to perceive that the old folk that remained in the winter houses neither saw nor knew him, but slid by like shades; for those that were left behind to see to the houses and dogs on this cooking-place through the summer, he was not there. He had an inkling that among these folk were some that for unknown causes were themselves outcast and the same as dead. Dogs that knew him earlier in the winter when he brought them food no longer snuffed at him.

And next night, as he laid himself down alone under a scrap of hide in the empty hut, and had eaten nothing all day but what he could find on rubbish-heaps, he mused on the sorry fate that had overtaken the skald who was one of the greatest champions and lovers of women that had been in the North. Not even dogs snuffed him, buried alive north of the World's end. And as he lay wondering if he would ever awake to life and exalt King Olaf, whom he believed to surpass other kings in strength and majesty, he heard a hoarse barking of dogs and creak of runners over the frozen snow, and then close to the hut a rustling of skin garments, such as is heard when Innuits are abroad, and now the stone was rolled from this tomb, and someone entered and came to the skald where he lay dead, and sat down hurriedly by his pillow and touched lips to his skin, and by the breath he knew it for Mamluka, his crime. From her

bosom she took warm seal-liver and gave it him. He thought these were the girl's words:

'It is true we are on our way south leaving your body behind, but when night had fallen, and we had pitched our tents, and all were at rest, I could not sleep, and knew only that I must come back to you, though you are dead. For I love you so dear that I had rather be with you dead than not at all.'

And she stayed a while with the skald in the darkness of night, and fed him with liver and happed him in a warm pelt and then went away. She did not hear what he said to her, and made no answer to a dead man, but loved him as utterly as a woman could, and was gone. It is believed that in this wise Mamluka was the dead Thormod Coal-browsskald's wife for three nights, stealing away from each camping-place when those that were with her had gone to sleep; but she did not return on the fourth night, nor ever more.

★ 43 ★

Now we leave the cold haunts of the trolls and bring our story home for a while to these Northlands, to give an account of the tidings in these years. Briefly, King Olaf Haraldsson had been overthrown by his enemies and driven out of the country. Many tales are told of the ruin of his kingdom, on the faith of heroes and skalds in Icelandic books, and but a very few shall be treated here. Yet we cannot conceal what learned men hold to have been its chief cause, the scant favour and great aversion this king enjoyed among the peasants of Norway, though he were advanced for a time by good inland chiefs whom he had bought or in other wise made his own. The peasants wanted

only a chance to fell the king, and with him the chiefs Sigurd Sow had incited to back him up; the Norse never esteemed King Olaf Haraldsson to be more than a fire-raiser, whose life was unatonably forfeit under the law and might be taken by thrall or free man in Norway.

Now since Olaf the Stout had acquired as a boy the viking habit of salting cows in far countries, he soon fell back into the groove when he became king, and was for robbing his neighbours. He ordered lifting of cattle, sheep and goats, as well as minever, in that border realm was taxed by the Swedish kings with the consent of the Danish kings. These exploits led to such illwill between him and the king of Swedes that it was never wholly repaired, even when they had contracted affinity; as the proverb says, that *long is, what first has been*. The Swedish kings, who called themselves lords of the Uppsala tribute, Olaf Skautkonung and then his son Önund, who was named Jakob by clerks, never left plotting against Olaf, reckoned him a dunce for his gadding life and sought to decoy him into mischief, and were never so furious as when he was called king in their hearing.

The Swedish kings were assiduous in making bad blood between Danish kings and Norsemen; the Danish kings called themselves suzerains of the North, but were so indeed only when they had on either side of them worthless rulers who were at loggerheads.

Olaf king of Swedes thought it monstrous that just when his fat namesake was killing his men and lifting cattle and goods in the Swedish demesnes in Norway, he should have other tidings of this fat man that spoke an equal temerity.

Olaf king of Swedes had many children; some were natural or baseborn, but others he had had by his queen. The king had given his daughters a noble manor in Göraland with fields, woods and waters, and sent them there every spring in company with some of his henchmen, who seemed to him more proper than others to be about women.

At this time certain chiefs in Norway, friends of the Swedish men who had charge of the king's daughters in

summer, brought it about that Olaf Haraldsson should ride off to Götaland in secret to hunt in its great woods full of game, and seek a night's lodging at the manor. He was given out to be a count of the German empire come here for pastime, and in his honour a noble banquet was held. Two of the Swedish king's daughters were then just grown; one was named Ingigerd, a fair and tall woman, that had a swanskin and could fly, and flew to choose men fates, if she would; she was the king's trueborn daughter and the best match in the North. Ingigerd had a baseborn half-sister Astrid; she was dark-skinned, very sprightly in talk when she chose, but given to long and dark brooding on affronts; she was a shrewd woman and staunch at the ale-mug, but was thought unlikely to make a good match out of the kingdom. Some say she was a dwarf.

The sisters agreed that this young king could not be numbered with the petty when chiefs were measured by famous deeds, since he had made his own way and had subdued Norway by brisk manhood and killed five kings in a morning; they reckoned him among the truly illustrious, though in Uppsala he were called cow-salter. At night the king's health was drunk with much courtesy.

And when Olaf the Stout awoke next morning, he asked Ingigerd king's-daughter for her hand; she made him a modest answer and consulted her chiefs, and they promised to speak for the match to her father King Olaf of Uppsala. Olaf the Stout parted from these women with a sad heart, yet with saddest heart from Ingigerd king's-daughter. They set him upon his way and took leave of him on a hill looking out over Sweden with its sun-bright waters, golden fields and dark forests. This pale sprig with the defiant, wandering gaze, joyless and unversed in play, since he had had little youth, unsteady-footed ashore, lumbering in his gait, bulky above and spindly below, with thin beard of down and leech's hands, was then in the eyes of two king's-daughters a hero of knightly song. Ingigerd went up to him and promised she would leave nothing undone to win her father's mind to his suit, and kissed him at parting.

Then he went to take leave of Astrid king's-daughter. She had less to say than her wont. He addressed her thus:

'What keepsake will you, Astrid, give this wayfarer, as he turns home from the golden peace of Sweden to the land of his enemies?'

She unloosed a gold pin from her neck and gave it him; he thanked her for the gift, held her mantle together at the throat and fastened it with a common pin of small worth. Then she spoke these words, whose meaning has been long in dispute:

'The woman who flouts you most shall harbour you, but she that laments you every day shall show you the door; she that decoyed you shall win your life, but she that loves you shall waste it.'

With that King Olaf returned to Norway.

These tidings seemed to the king of Swedes far worse than that the king of Norway was killing his men and cows both.

The Swedish kings have always been as much mightier and greater chiefs than the kings of Norway, as there are fewer stories about them, and the cause is that Icelandic books have raised up the kings of Norway from small men to great. Swedish kings did not regard the kinless robbers or foreign runagates who were for ever springing up in Norway on the ground of descent from Harald Shockhead as fit to intermarry with the Uppsala kings, who could in sooth trace their lineage back to Yngvifrey by thirty descents, all in the male line; moreover, the Swedes thought themselves bound to thwart kings of Norway, especially if they made trouble in the next kingdom; and it was but lately that Olaf king of Swedes had leagued himself with the Danish king Svend to kill Olaf Tryggvason. Nothing pleased the Swedes better than for the kingdom of Norway to be poor and sundered, with small kings each ruling a scrap of it. And therefore Olaf king of Swedes was struck dumb, when he heard that his daughter Ingigerd and the fat man had been consorting.

The Swedes had lands beyond Eastersalt, and Swedish merchants journeyed all over Russia as far as Byzantium.

The Swedish kings had kinsmen among the lords of that country; these ruled over a wide empire, but were not suffered by the high kings of Byzantium to bear a loftier title than knjas. At this time Jarislav, son to King Vladimir the Saint, was conquering the land; his enemies were his thrce or four brothers, and Jarislav had sworn to spare nothing and never lay down his arms till he had made an end of them all. Now as Jarislav knjas was hard pressed in fight, and got too little support against his brothers from native chiefs ruling inland, he sent men to Uppsala to put the Uppsala kings in mind that they were his kinsmen, and promised in return for their aid that Swedish merchants should have greater privileges in Koenugard than before and estates for their maintenance when they tarried there through the winter. Olaf king of Swedes said Jarislav should have as many fighting-men as he would, and bade his vassals call men to arms on coasts and islands east and west of the Salt, wherever he ruled. But he added this clause in secret, that when Jarislav had gained the victory over his brothers he was to take Ingigerd Olafsdaughter to wife and give her a half-share in his throne and empire, and the Swedish king's envoys were to go with her and be her counsellors and stay in the east. And so Oalf the Stout heard these tidings of Ingigerd his betrothed after their meeting in Götaland, that the girl was gone from Sweden and wedded to Knjas Jarislav the Wise, son to Vladimir the Holy of Russia.

But then it befell, while Olaf the Stout thought himself foully jilted by Ingigerd king's-daughter, whom he loved above other women, and fooled by her kin in most things, that her baseborn sister Astrid declared her love to him; and at the peace treaty between the Swedish king and the king of Norway, chiefs from both lands favoured and supported this match. At last the king of Swedes yielded to the persuasion of his chiefs and gave Olaf the Stout his baseborn daughter Astrid; but things were cool between father and son-in-law and hollow and half-hearted between the kings as before, though slaughter and robbery abated.

Now it is to be told that meanwhile Knud Svendsson's officers were ruling in Denmark, while he himself governed, England. Knud's proxy was his brother-in-law and trusty friend, Jarl Ulf Sprakaleggsson. These were good years for Denmark by land and sea, and the prosperity of the commons increased, as in every land when lords are far off and wars with them. The Uppsala kings looked somewhat askance on the wealth peace had brought to Denmark, and there was murmuring and defection among Swedish peasants, who felt they had enough to bear from their tax-gatherers in peacetime, and were now summoned to war with unknown nations east in the World, while the Danes on their other side lived rich and merry. Friendship sprang up, more than was wholesome, between Swedish and Danish peasants whose land marched, and some chiefs were for joining themselves to Denmark rather than acknowledge the king of Swedes.

But in like measure as the wealth of Denmark increased for want of kings, so did hunger and distress in King Olaf Haraldsson the Stout's realm of Norway. Every penny went to maintain the force he needed always at hand against the peasants of Norway, and to the promoting of Christian worship and building of long-ships.

But when at length they were without corn in Norway, and many who had got their living from two goats now had only one, while others, and those far more, who had subsisted on one goat now had none, and were gone to the forest with their brood to gnaw bark or dig for roots, then Olaf the Stout sent to his father-in-law in Uppsala, praying him for corn and meat, or bright silver to sell foreign merchants for food. His peasants, he said, were stripped bare with feeding his host, and many had been reduced to beggary, and had now Christ's goodness for their support and were church paupers, for the churches had been enriched with land and good things.

The Swedes rarely had corn or meat enough for their need, but had good ore in their mines and forged iron better than most in the North ; they had always arms to spare, even when they had not a bite to eat. The king of Swedes informed

his fat son-in-law that he had certainly neither corn nor meat to give the Norsemen.

'But next to us lies a country superabounding in corn and cattle, and that is Denmark. And you sea-robbers must have gone downhill, if you are content to starve while others are stuffing themselves at your house-door. None have heard tell that Norsemen had ever before to beg their bread from the Swedes, and of us no innovation is to be expected in such a case ; but I will furnish you with weapons and ships, so you may keep the wolf from the door.'

Chroniclers take it to have been the first step in King Olaf the Stout's downfall that he went to war with the Danes, beguiled by his father-in-law the king of Swedes. He gathered all the ships he could come by, manned them with peasants who had lost their livelihood in Norway, gave them whale-meat to eat, and when he had a fair wind sailed down the coast to Denmark ; here Swedish chiefs were awaiting him with a few ships, sent by the Uppsala king to his aid. No sooner had Olaf the Stout reached Denmark than he fell to his old viking practice of making raids to kill cattle and salt them down. He proclaimed duly that an army of defenders was come to free Denmark from the yoke ; and as the Danes were thinking no harm, at first they suffered great loss of men and horn-beasts, but then their chiefs sent the war-arrow through the country and took the field, and sent also to King Knud in England, letting him know that a Norse army was here to save Denmark, and praying their suzerain to come quickly. Knud was not backward, but levied a great army on the sudden, all Englishmen ; he had wondrous many and great ships, and so well rigged that a finer fleet never sailed against the North ; all the ships were painted above the waterline, and many had gilded heads and sails with blue, red and green stripes. And when their coming was bruited in the Sound, the Swedish king's ships made the best of their way home, while Olaf's fled into Eastersalt for dear life, and many were lost in storms, for their yards and rigging were not good. But those that made port in Sweden and were worth anything, the Swedes

impounded to satisfy ancient debts, and some they stole. And such as remained in the harbours, that no thief or ruffian had a mind to steal or break up, were shut in there and could not get back to Norway, since Knud lay in the Sound with his whole fleet. Winter drew on, and Olaf the Stout's host sat in their ships in Sweden and had nothing to live on, and the Swedes gave them no succour. The end of it was that the Norse peasants declared for abandoning the ships and trying to make their way home through Sweden in winter, and the king was brought to attempt this journey. At first King Olaf had horses to ride, but the men ate his horses, and then the king had to go afoot like others, but was carried over gullies and stones, for he was heavy-bodied and lubberly on dry land. His men had to rob freely, for the Swedes gave them nothing, and trounced his men like dogs when they could come at them, and some they kept as thralls. But those who won home barefoot to Norway were slow to forget that march.

Now Olaf had but few men and could not raise a fresh army to hold Norway against the peasants, and his fleet was lost. That winter the peasants reduced him to such straits that when summer came, with tumult and insurrection all over the country, he had nothing to do but flee afoot with his whole household, and take the shortest road out of Norway across the fells.

But now that Olaf Haraldsson the Stout had been overthrown, that was again seen which often befalls discarded kings, that most grow cool to them, especially those who were once hottest, and so with Queen Astrid. She thought it a weary life, to be stumbling over fells and through scree and gravel out of the country, with her husband reviled and banished and their little son crying, and with no train but a few rascals Olaf had hired for silver. Gone too were all other near and trusty friends to King Olaf, but furthest from him were those that had most exalted him with fair words and courtly forms, like his minion Sigvat skald of Apavatn; gone too was Bishop Grimkel the English of Canterbury, whom the king had saved on the banks of the Thames, and

made his court bishop, confessor and dearest friend in the teeth of the see of Bremen and the Lord Pope himself ; all were gone. Old writers have hinted that King Olaf was then so friendless in the land that he had to pilfer and rob to feed himself and his queen and their son on this his departure from Norway.

And when Olaf Haraldsson with his poor household came down out of the woods between Norway and Värmland, envoys of his father-in-law the king of Swedes were waiting to take his wife Astrid and their son and carry them home to Uppsala.

The king asked : 'What will you do for me, seeing I am allied to the court of Uppsala?'

The envoys said : 'Do for yourself, ninny.'

There King Olaf parted from his queen in the border forest ; but he would not give up their son, for fear his mother's kin meant him harm, and there on the fell he got the queen's leave to take the boy with him. Then Queen Astrid rode to Uppsala to her kinsfolk.

But when King Olaf had gone from door to door in Värmland with his son for a time, he made his way to the coast and took passage for himself and the boy with traders who were returning in the autumn to Russia.

★ 44 ★

At this time a ship reached Nidaros from Greenland after two winters abroad, and such a voyage was always tidings in Norway, for not all ships returned from the Greenland voyage ; and though teeth of walrus and whale might be got there, and there was no other ivory at hand in the north, merchants would not trade to those parts because of the sea-ice and prolonged storms, with

breakers heavier than were known in other seas. And when the ship neared land, and the seafarers came in talk with the first islander, they heard of change in the country. King Olaf Haraldsson was pulled down and driven beyond Easter-salt by his enemies, and most of his friends were against him.

The shipmen were seized with grief at these tidings. They, who had sailed out with the king's cargo two years before, now returned to the same land, and it was the land of his enemies; Norway seemed to them to hang like a necklace whose jewel is gone. Vainly does green show in the field and leaf in the forest, if men are not clustered about their chief. Like most at such times, they lost sight of the comfort that man comes in man's stead as king in king's, but yet especially coin in coin's stead. Now it was bruited that King Knud Svendsson of England lay with his fleet in Viken, and that his errand was to take the Norse king's realm in his charge, after the old custom that kings ruling in Denmark should also possess Norway, no matter who briefly raised their heads there. Men dispatched by Knud went all over Norway, wooing chiefs to be his men and offering vassals more power and higher titles than they had had before, and honour and profit far greater than Sigurd Sow had sold them, when he went about the country with pack-horses. The chiefs were promised wider demesnes for their maintenance and freer taxation than before and the English host at their backs. And good men in Norway thought it the more desirable to submit to Knud, since they felt assured that the English fleet would be better able to keep down turbulent peasants than King Olaf's starved housecarls had been.

That night curious townsfolk gathered in a taproom in Nidaros to ask the shipmen tidings from Greenland and learn what valuables they brought home. Among the seafarers was a haggard man with hollow cheeks and sore bruises, torn and tousled and nearly barefoot. He was holding a tattered pelt about him. The townsfolk asked who this scarecrow might be, and if he were a Lapp or a Finn, and why such men did not stay in Greenland. The seafarers replied that he was an Iclander, and had seen haunts further north

than the rest of men, where was almighty cold and such darkness as only the night of the grave can pass ; trolls had left him on a skerry not far from the West Pale of Greenland, and there he had sat under a flag of distress for six days before the shipmen had found him, and his limbs were near dead, but they saved his life. Unknown trolls had found the man on the coast of Northseat and brought him south to that skerry.

The Norse have always made it their jest that Icelanders claim to descend from kings, and now the townsmen of Nidaros asked the stranger :

‘What kings do you come of, Blubberlander?’

The tattered man said : ‘King Olaf Haraldsson’s champions were my friends, and that one was nearest me who had noblest heart.’

They replied : ‘In King Olaf Haraldsson the Stout’s following were none but cravens and cadgers, and here in the Trondelag it is better for a man not to take the names of firewolves and thieves in his mouth. But from your bragging it can be seen that you are truly an Iclander, though in sorry case.’

The tattered man said : ‘We Icelanders are the only men in the North that can neither be crushed nor bought.’

They laughed and said it was strange to have such a flying of earth in still weather.

‘Why are folk so puffed up with chopping blubber on the further skerry of the World?’

The tattered man said : ‘It is true we went into the west and became Icelanders when Harald Shockhead was burning in Norway, and this we did rather than live in fellowship with men that would be drubbed or slaughtered for money. We took no possessions out of Norway but skald’s lore and warrior’s ways and tales of olden kings. We carried to Iceland Mimer’s head and the skald’s horn, but you sit stupidly behind without skalds, your tongue is jargon and you cannot make your own fame. Norway will never have any fame but what Icelanders give it.’

They said it was time to be done with the fame Norway got from Icelanders, who had never in song or story praised any Norsemen but ruffians and felons, recruited by lords of the land to oppress the commons and trample them in the dust. Icelanders held none to be men but such as killed folk wholesale. The townsfolk said yon zany with the title of king, Harald Shockhead, whom the Icelanders ran away from, was not a bit worse than some that Icelandic skalds had praised highest, such as Olaf the Stout.

Then a stately man came from the host's table in the inner nook of the taproom, well-dressed, trimly combed, black-eyed and with sword and arm-ring. And as he came nearer, there was silence among those townsfolk who had been deriding the Icelfander over the mead.

The courtly man spoke thus :

'Good sirs, I take this man you are baiting to be my countryman, and I would have you regard his sore feet and consider what heavy roads he has trodden, and likewise the furrows in his face ; this man has certainly travelled far longer and harder roads than you. Maybe he has more experience than some that live quiet inshore in Norway, the men of small places with small souls. Who are you, Icelfander?'

Then he got up from the drinking-board, that poor old man who had been mocked by the townsfolk, clad in sacking beneath shreds of pelt, his feet swathed in rags, with sores on his legs showing the white bone, lame of both legs ; some of his fingers were gone with frostbite, and the others crooked into the palm ; his ears were gone and the tip of his nose marred ; most of his teeth had fallen out, his skull was white and bare, his beard streaked with gery. This man had no weapon or shield for his defence, and nothing that could be valued in money. And now he rose from his place for a stately chief, a countryman, who was taking his part from kindness, and gave his name and quality.

'I am named Thormod,' said he, 'and am Bessi's son from the Westfjords. Some knew me as Coalbrowsskald at Isafjord Deep and in the Jökulfjords, when we were younger.'

And when he had said this, the lordly man went up to his

countryman and embraced and kissed him and bade him welcome.

'My name is Sigvat,' said he, 'I am son to Thord, and my father and I have swelled kings' fame, though such honour be transient. But how have the fates dealt with Thormod, whose lays all children in Iceland know? You look to me somewhat ill-used by the sisters.'

'I was the greatest yeoman in the west country,' said the skald with a smile. 'I had the noblest woman in Isafjord Deep, a valkyrie in beauty and magnanimity, and by her two little daughters with the nimblest toes and richest laugh in the Westfjords. They used to waken me in the morning, one kissed my foot and the other pressed her forefinger on the tip of my nose.'

The kings' skald called the serving-maid, and bade her set ale before them and salted pork.

'And let me hear, Thormod skald, what has been much talked of, how you left Iceland.'

With that the courtier had the guest's sore feet washed and bound up. Then Thormod began, looking at his feet:

'It was known to all in Iceland that I had sworn brotherhood with the champion whose like was never born in the North; I loved him above all others and he me, though we had not the luck to be long together. It was in our pact as oath-brothers that only the death of both should break our alliance.'

'I have heard Thorgeir Havarsson named, but the more I hear of him the less I can make out what that champion was worth,' said Sigvat skald.

Thormod said: 'What he was worth? There beat in his breast a heart no bigger than a rowan-berry, and hard as an acorn.'

Sigvat replied: 'Such a champion must indeed have had something great about him; but what can you adduce, Thormod, more than his small heart to prove his excellence?'

'That the king,' said Thormod, 'who was backed by that heart is the greatest in the North and in the whole World, and has therefore also become my king.'

Sigvat said: 'I ought to know something of the king you are speaking of. I was his courtier and near friend no less than ten winters, and we conversed together of many things, yet I do not recall that ever I heard him name that knight of the small heart you mention. Nor does the heart seem to have procured victory, either to him that owned it or him that was to lean upon it, King Olaf. Now they are both down, and some think it long since the hillsides of Norway had the sun on them.'

Thormod replied: 'Thorgeir is indeed fallen in the king's service, and still lies unatoned, though much was offered for his revenge; but for Thorgeir's sake I have made a lay on King Olaf Haraldsson, and that will stand, as long as the North is peopled.'

Sigvat skald smiled as he replied: 'We skalds cannot tell which lays will be borne longest in mind; I too made some verses on King Olaf.'

Thormod said: 'I forsook my home in Isafjord Deep, where the ram goes in his thick coat, and a halibut fetches the price of a bull. My valkyrie with swan-wings I gave to a thrall. And to my two Nimbletoes, who gazed on me more confidingly than others, I left Thorgeir Havarsson's skull.'

'It is a bad bargain,' replied Sigvat, 'to make songs for chiefs, and let others take the biggest and finest fish in the sea; I should never have been a skald if I might have had such good fish. I became a skald as my fathers did, because we had nothing; I was a poor lad housed with strangers at Apavatn, where strange little fish with their fins backward play in the tarn, carrying skaldship in their heads; and he that sets his teeth in that head is never the same again.'

'I sailed to Greenland,' said Thormod, 'bound by Thorgeir's and my oath to hunt his slayers, and yet they were scarce worth killing, they were so abject; one was a well-pisser and the other carried his lice from door to door.'

Sigvat asked what had stayed Thormod from killing these sons of Hcl.

Thormod said the vermin always slipped through his fingers.

'When I sought at Hornstrands, they were gone to Melrakka Plain, and when I came to the Plain, they were gone to Greenland; and when with much tossing about I came to the East Pale, they were said to be in the West Pale; and in the West Pale I met my old paramour, that had cast a spell on me with her love, and she offered me a retreat with such peace and happiness as are to be found in Greenland; but Thorgeir Havarsson's killers slipped away to Northseat, where they consorted with trolls. But when I had at length escaped that cruel woman, who has always held me under her sorcery in the darkest haunts, I made my way north over skerries, where may be found the last little seedcorn of human life, to try whether it would be granted me to take revenge. I joined company with men who were setting out after narwhals' teeth and to slaughter trolls. But when the trolls we were out to slaughter had saved my life, and mended my broken leg and frostbite and ranked me with dogs, it seemed to me that those churls, Wellpisser and Lousecraw, must be phantoms spun from my brain, and I forgot my errand, once I was north of Northseat; it seems to me liker the truth that Thorgeir's slayers have their abode under Niflheim in the ninth and worst world. But,' said Thormod at last, 'it is my hope that King Olaf, when I am brought before him, will set to my credit the distant roads I have trodden, with great pains and long wanderings, though my intent came to nothing. Not all would have been prepared to make such a journey for duty's sake.'

Sigvat was stirred by these tidings, and put many questions on the trolls' dwelling-places in Greenland. And Thormod had much to say of this wonder, that there are creatures in human shape who do not hold killing the greatest work, and cannot do famous deeds, who live with neither king nor ruler nor bishop over them, nor judges nor landowners, nor any great folk but the man who has made the moon his cooking-place, and the one-armed old woman

who lives in the depths of the sea. Lastly Thormod repeated to Sigvat and others in the taproom the great lay he had made with burning heart for King Olaf Haraldsson, while he was delayed in those haunts where Allfather dwelt with frost-giants, before he wrought earth, water and air.

Sigvat gave ear to the lay, and so did the others drinking in the taproom. And when Thormod had reached the end of it, they sat silent at the praise that was here bestowed on King Olaf Haraldsson. At last the skald Sigvat Thordsson spoke up:

‘That is indeed a good lay, and far better than those I made for King Olaf ; yet it has a drawback. A good lay is little worth, if it comes too late into the World. The praise offered another king than him who now rules the land is worse than any silence whatever, though it be well sung. Lays of a fallen king are no lays. A lay of a victorious king, who is now ruling the country, that is a lay. And Olaf Haraldsson is further from you today, skald, in his own royal castle, than when you were in Greenland with trolls and had no great hope of coming before his face.’

Thormod said: ‘Thorgeir and I often spoke together of how a bold heart is the same in victory and defeat. And I believe the king who is lord of Thorgeir Havarsson’s heart in life and death will in the end have more might than others against his enemies, and that his emblem will stand for ever, though he himself should fall. For not even on Bifröst, that is bent against heaven, nor in Isafjord Deep, where my kingdom stood and my bliss, nor in Greenland right up to Northseat, where fish have costlier teeth than in other places, nor north of Northseat itself, where trolls rule, is there might or fame but in the breast that holds noble heart.’

Sigvat said: ‘I know, Thormod, that you have run more dangers than other men through your exceeding brisk manhood, that shrinks from no venture for duty’s sake ; but of all the perils a hero can fall into, I would warn you from true experience against that which is worse than being tossed about on the coasts of Greenland or cast up on North-

seat, and that is binding yourself to a ruler, however glorious he may be. The man who keeps faith with a ruler is in worse plight than if he were dead. For a ruler is the first to be hung up on the gallows. And where are we, his near friends, when our stay is to hang? And secondly, a ruler or king is always willing to sell his enemy land and title, and to boot all his men, but particularly his heroes, and make a league with his master and conqueror to murder his near friends and admirers by stealth, all those whose faith has been greatest. The ruler is the only man in the country who can go over to the ranks of his enemies the day he sees his advantage in it. And he that stands by his ruler is apt to be slain by him before other men, but especially before his enemies. This story is related of Thorgeir Havarsson, who had nobler heart than most of King Olaf's heroes and was truer to him than others, that when the king grew sick of the hero, he sent him to Iceland at his peril to kill Icelanders, and the mission ended as it was meant. It is wise to pay a king homage, while the peasants suffer him on the throne. But when the throne begins tottering beneath him, it is wise of a skald to wrest his lay to the king they are more inclined to suffer; and if a host stronger than the king's men come ashore, then he is wiser to sell his faith to a foreign army as good chiefs use, than to sing the praises of a sold or doomed king.'

Thormod said: 'I did not think, when I used to hear of Sigvat Thordsson in Iceland, and your king won Norway through his champions' stoutness, that you would be the first to desert him when his luck was waning; far other was the true warrior's praise in old songs I learned of my father.'

'Friend,' said Sigvat Thordsson, 'skalds ought not to wrangle about goat's wool; it is more to the point that the peasants here have deposed King Olaf, and that a foreign chief is come with fourteen hundred ships, and according to custom has suborned the good men in Norway, that others follow; you are now in the English king's realm and not in King Olaf Haraldsson's; thus it is. And if a hero and

skald cannot see it, he has thrown life and fortune away. And then let each think as he will of true manhood.'

Thormod said: 'Then a wayfaring man like me is fallen on evil days, who departed from wealth and love, child and home, meadow and field, to take a just revenge for my brother, and offered to boot hands and feet, nose and ears, hair and teeth, all in hope to win the friendship of the king Thorgeir had chosen us; and you are that king's familiar and wear his massy ring on your arm and go in the scarlet he decked you in, yet I must hear from your mouth the slander that he willed death on the heart to which I swore fealty, and which was so fearless that the thought of it was always my lifespring in good and ill, and most when my own heart trembled at death. And I would rather have pined away in the arms of an evil woman or the power of trolls, than listen without weapon or defence to such spiteful talk.'

'You are wrong, wise as you are, to reproach me with speaking ill of King Olaf Haraldsson. A better friend I have never had; he was the jewel of kings in liberality to his friends, and guileless in most things. Yet it may not be concealed that King Olaf was a dull-witted man and in like measure uncouth, reared on ship-board abroad and used to the trade of robbery from a child. He could never master his legs on dry land, but rocked and waddled. Christian counts and bishops making wars in the south bought him and his fellows to burn and kill for them in France, but baptised them first, for Christ would have champions who fight for his kings confess the true faith. And the learning King Olaf got there was the cause that in any strait he knew but two courses, baptism or death. And by reason of his childlike simplicity he had to have others always about him, who could tell him when to baptise and when to hew down. Yet I believe King Olaf would have done right, if he could in any wise of himself have told good from ill. And Olaf Haraldsson's childlike demeanour in all shifts brought me to pity him more than most men and love him better.'

It is recorded in books that when King Knud Svendsson left Denmark for ever to be king of England, he sent his and Queen Emma's son, Hardeknud, to be brought up by his good-brother and best friend in Denmark, Jarl Ulf Sprakaleggsson, whom he had made his proxy there to defend his kingdom, while he was away governing far countries.

But since Knud Svendsson tarried a great while at this task, the Danes grew weary and said that Denmark was theirs, and that they were no king's thralls, and the chiefs thought it boded ill that there was no man in the country to put fear in its commons with the strong hand as good kings use; and therefore Ulf Sprakaleggsson agreed with the chiefs to offer the peasants land and good things and all manner of relief from their heavy taxes, if they would take as king his foster-son Hardeknud, who was childish in years and wit; and when that was done, he himself took all might and majesty in the realm of Denmark, without his friend Knud Svendsson's leave or knowledge.

Now we shall briefly relate what passed in Denmark after the English host had scared Olaf Haraldsson out of the Sound, along with the Swedish ships the Uppsala king had sent out as decoybirds to lead the Norse into mischief. When the cowsalters from Norway had been driven away and there was peace in the land, Knud turned his steps to the men who were to keep Denmark for him; he rode from the ships to Roskilde, where were his good-brother Ulf Sprakaleggsson and his son Hardeknud; in that place the emissaries of Bremen had established a cloister; there too was a cathedral, which has long stood in the town, dedicated to the Holy Trinity. It was called St. Saviour's church.

Jarl Ulf Sprakaleggsson made a great banquet for the suzerain and his captains, and many high folk were there to wait upon Knud Svendsson ; indeed he had then added to himself a title, Knud the Rich or Great, for the victory he had won over the English king Ethelred and Queen Emma. Ulf jarl was at this time the richest man in Denmark and his banquet for Knud was in keeping ; but we are not now to rehearse what entertainment they had.

Northern books say of Ulf Sprakaleggsson that he was a hot-tempered man, advised and firm in his rule and a true chief in all his ways. That night the two friends, King Knud and Ulf jarl, played at chess ; the king was absent at play and let the game slip. Snorri says he made a wrong move. The king was for taking back his piece and making another move instead. And when he went to do this, Ulf jarl was displeased ; he upset the board, got up and walked away. Soon afterwards it was bedtime.

There are two conflicting tales of the passage between the brothers-in-law that now follows. In this book we shall prefer what was committed to writing in English annals at the time when these events were transacted ; and we do so because Knud was then king of England, and it is right to give audience to his clerks and his henchmen, who would by no means decry him ; and moreover some of the Icelandic accounts of these doings appear somewhat questionable, after a chequered life in the memory of storytellers and knowing women in a strange land for seven full generations before they were written down.

It is told that Knud had as his bodyguard and servant a man from Norway named Ivar ; it was so with princes, that they would at no rate have men about them of the nation they ruled over. They put no trust in them, for the ungente disposition of commons towards their lords. And Knud Svendsson had neither Danish nor English men in his chamber, because he knew where his enemies might be found. But when the king was abed that night, he told his man to get up and go and kill Jarl Ulf Sprakaleggsson. The man quickly dressed himself and went out, but came back

a good while after and said the jarl was gone to completorium with the bishops. Then they put the light out and went to sleep. But after vigiliam King Knud rose from his bed and woke his servant Ivar, and bade him put on his shoes and go and kill Jarl Ulf Sprakaleggsson. Ivar went out in the night and was long gone on that errand, but at length returned and said Ulf jarl was gone to embrace his doxy in the town, and in her vestibule were two lions with fire in their eyes and jaws, and in the forecourt eighteen fierce bitches to guard the lions. Then the king and Norse Ivar lay down; but towards the end of the night King Knud woke again and called his servant, and said it was now near the time when lords return from their doxies, and the Norseman was to lie in wait for the jarl and kill him. The servant rubbed the sleep from his eyes and went out. Cocks crowed in the town. A great while went by, and then Ivar returned to the king's bed-chamber with ill news, for the jarl had driven home to his wife, King Knud's sister, and their bed-place was bolted within, and four waiting-maids slept in the anteroom with much courtesy, and over each maid watched a mail-clad knight. Then the first bell sounded ad matutinum in St. Saviour's church. King Knud said that of all nations the Norse had least to their credit, and that they had more beating laid up for them than others. Then they slept the rest of the night.

Next day the king was early astir, and went to hear mass in St. Saviour's church. At the same time his good-brother Ulf jarl came to church. They greeted each other and entered the chancel and sat side by side before the altar and heard mass. King Knud always heard it with sighs and hot tears. But when canon is reached in the mass, good men are wont to kneel and cover their faces as Christ descends to take up his abode in the bread, which clerks call transsubstantionem. Then King Knud the Great leaned over his bosom friend and laid one hand tenderly on his breast to find his heart, murmuring holy words from the Psalter in his ear; but as he was speaking them he drove his dagger into the jarl's breast between the ribs and

through the heart, so that Jarl Ulf Sprakaleggsson instantly got his death.

It is a token of the esteem King Knud enjoyed among bishops and archbishops and with Dominus papa, but especially in the eyes of White Christ, that no sovereign has been higher in fame or repute either before or since, in Denmark or other parts; for he is the third king in all Christendom to have borne the name of magnus, which in our tongue is the Rich. Ulf jarl was carried quietly out of the chancel door, while the bishops sang mass to an end; then brides of Christ wiped the blood from the pavement, clerks purified St. Saviour's church with blessing, and all was as though undone.

That same day Knud the Rich had his son Hardeknud brought to him in the market-place, and gave the boy fitting chastisement with the birch, while the peasants looked on; then he took him on his knee, kissed him and said he should sit next his father in the high-seat. And Northern books have it that all the Danes rallied to King Knud and submitted to him for love, when this was dispatched. And the king found other proxies to govern Denmark, but they are not in this story.

Now we will speak further of Thormod Coalbrowsskald, after his coming to Norway sore battered with toils and hardship in Greenland. Icelanders in Nidaros, seeing a skald and countryman in this woeful case, procured an old peasant wife that was cunning in sickness to heal the man, and he kept his bed in the farmhouse the rest of the summer; flesh grew over his bones, and he mended of the disorder bred of strange fare while he was in the troll-world. But when he got back on his feet, to be sure he was very lame, for both legs were crippled, and hair and teeth did not grow afresh, nor yet fingers and toes that the frost had taken, nor was his youthful beauty reborn, and the sorry clothes he wore were alms from the charitable. In autumn he had nothing to live on, and the Icelanders had left Trondheim with their ships. And the man of rank, Sigvat king's skald, was also gone.

But when Thormod sought to approach the Norse and would have diverted them with good lays, he got little countenance; the time had now dawned in Norway when folk ran after fashions of the South and liked better to hear of holy men and women and their miracle-working or give ear to clerks' song than to drink in tidings of Hrafnistumen, Hrolf's champions and Volsungs or other glorious men of old; the Norse thought they could well do without long, tedious lays gabbled by strolling beggars from Iceland. And when the skald went to the high-born and to rich men who owned ships in the town, and would be their gleeman, these great folk were more for hiring dwarfs from the South to do juggling tricks. And when he offered to recite them the Greenland lay of King Olaf and his men, all said with one voice that that was the last king they would hear praised; and there was not a magnate in Norway but reckoned it gain and glory to serve the king of England; most good Norsemen were loud in praise of Knud's fleet, when he came to Norway with English fighting men in fourteen hundred and forty ships, and the sails had blue and red stripes. It was a poor skald, they said, who made lays of quondam kings; and he that would not follow the king with the redoubtable army was tying his luck to a fox's tail, they said, though good men were wont to flatter the ears of bubble-kings while they lasted. Now it was Thormod's fate to wander from door to door, getting his bread by such labours as rather tend to increase of days than fame; he cleaned out the peasants' sties and herded their goats. And wherever Thormod dragged himself through the townlands of Norway, all judged from his rags and the carriage that marks a poor wretch in sickness and decay, that here came an out-cast; boors and starvelings laughed at him and called him tomfool, and the boys shouted after him. And he, that had been a skald and athlete at Reykjaholar and in Vatnsfjorð and the cynosure of west-country women, a viking at Horn and fortune's darling in Isafjorð Deep, felt it strange to pass his frost-eaten hand over his bald, earless and noseless head or pull a white tuft from his beard.

Since it was a main clause in Thormod Coalbrowsskald's doctrine that every power and authority swaying an issue, in Heaven or on Earth is noble and praiseworthy, but especially men who rule great lands, as the gods rule over Heaven and the heaven-dwellers, he fell into two minds now that he had to muck out sties and tend pigs for his faith to Thorgeir Havarsson, and began to wonder whether he had truly mastered the doctrine, if he were still to honour chiefs in the lowest ignominy, one butchered over a chopping-block in the far north, the other hunted alive into exile; more and more his thoughts strayed to the might and authority of Knud Svendsson, who came to Norway under innumerable sails and had won a greater empire than any other king in the North known to story. And the end of it was that the skald wrested King Olaf's lay to the honour of King Knud Svendsson, and exceeding praise of the victories that king had won in England over King Ethelred and in Denmark over Ulf jarl, like as he had subdued Norway only with the bruit of his coming, under striped sails.

Now King Knud shipped his treasures with English money to seek out noble Norsemen in private, and himself settled with a great force in Zealand, at Trælleborg. An Icelandic merchant is held to have carried Thormod Coalbrowsskald to Denmark in his ship, on the ground that so excellent a skald would reap little fame among Norse crofters, and that such a man should have his retreat in the halls of kings ruling many great lands at once.

Trælleborg had been built with Roman science by foreign masters at the behest of Knud's father, Svend Bluetoothsson. Within the ramparts stood thirty high-timbered houses, and the Belt beyond the mouth of the river was swarming with ships, painted in fair colours above the water-line. But when Thormod Coalbrowsskald came to the gate, the guards said paupers approaching a king's castle deserved death, especially when they were so lame as to be useless in war, and that the beggar was crazed who sought admittance to kings like Knud, the greatest champion since Carolus Mag-

nus died, and the fellow of emperors, high kings and Dominus papa himself.

‘Where are your clothes and weapons to go before such a king?’

‘I am an Icelandic skald,’ said the guest. ‘I pray you let the king know, good warriors, that I have journeyed through colder and darker lands than most men and over wild seas, and lived with trolls north of human life; and in the wind of the moonbride, which is thought, I have stored a lay greater and better than Dominus papa himself ever sang to his master King Christ, who the trolls say has his cooking-pot on the moon.’

The guard said:

‘King Knud will have no leprous strollers coming before him tonight, when he has as guest the skald Sigvat Thordsson, whom we ushered into the hall in sable furs and shoes edged with gold, King Olaf Haraldsson’s courtier on his way to Rome. He must be a far greater skald than you, though forsooth we of the king’s guard think there is more sport in apes, dwarfs and pipers than in all you Icelanders.’

In this book we shall not describe the banquet that Knud Svendsson gave at Traelleborg in Zealand, when he had reconquered Denmark with other adjoining lands and was at point to leave the country again. But knowing men say that among the guests was Sigvat Thordsson of Apavatn on Grimsnes, in good satin with chased sword, with gold rings on his fingers and those weighty arm-rings that can only be had of great kings and suffragans. It is held that at this banquet Sigvat recited a lay with the burden that none towered higher under Heaven itself than King Knud: Knud reached to Heaven. In this lay it is told how Knud had the news that his dominion was wasting in the North, that the enemies he feared least, like Olaf the Stout and his train in Norway, had been driven out by their commons, and those he suspected most had seized power in Denmark, his good-brothers and near friends. It is not named in the lay how Knud frightened King Olaf out of Denmark, but Knud is the more praised because he came with an English

army to defend Denmark from Danish peasants. The peasants' designs alone seemed to him worse than the rule of friends and enemies put together; and so he set out with fourteen hundred and forty English ships, to show the peasants of Norway and Denmark that he towered highest to Heaven of all created kings and was nearest God and such a friend of Christ and his mother that without a word even from the Lord Pope he could murder his dear friend at mass before the high altar during transsubstantione panis. And so soon as one of the king's deeds is named, this refrain comes back: Knud is such a king that he alone can be seen under the arch of Heaven: Knud reaches Heaven.

When this feast was drunk to an end, King Knud left the North for England to govern there. But the skald Sigvat Thordsson had wealth enough to buy himself horses when he came to the continent, and rode south over the the Alps that autumn.

★ 46 ★

Olaf Haraldsson left Sweden with his son Magnus and took passage with merchants in the autumn as far as Koenugard, where the grand knjas Jarislav the Wise ruled with his consort Ingigerd of Sweden. There he looked to find some help.

The town rises on the southern bank of the Dnjepr, where the river is broadest, like a sea. Here stood on the bank a noble castle, with gardens about it and high towers; on these towers were always watchmen spying out for Kumans or other enemy hordes, for this land never grew faithful to its lord. Within the walls of the town was also a cloister, ~~one~~ of the most glorious in this part of the World, since it owned what most Christians would have been glad of;

in the first place a finger of the holy protomartyr Stephen, which finger learned men have called one of the best safeguards in a shortage of flesh-meat, and a powerful resource against grasshoppers, as well as against usury of Jews; the cloister had likewise in its possession, whole and unmarred, the earthly body of Jarislav's father, the blessed King Vladimir; in this cloister were also more heads of those that had fallen for the Holy Allwisdom than other cloisters had thereabouts, and these heads yielded a rich harvest of powerful works to the profit of the whole nation.

It is told that when Olaf Haraldsson came to Kœnugard in the autumn with his son Magnus and sought out Jarislav, the knjas would scarce own a banished king of Norway, coming as a runaway, of no birth nor might; besides the man had had shoes, his coat was much spotted with grease, and his son was shoeless. He thought it strange that the man who was his rival of old should seek friendship with him; he said besides that when he killed his four brothers in battle in the sweat of his brow, it was not to give foreign runagates land in Kœnugard; yet since the merchants had now hauled their ships out of the river before the frost should set in, he suffered this Olaf to go along with them to the district where Swedish traders were wont to collect dues for their support when they wintered in Kœnugard.

It is said there is no suitor so mean in the eyes of women, basely as they may have spurned him or played him false, but that ever after they have more kindness for him than for other men, and the greater kindness as they advance in years, and they are always ready to befriend an old suitor to their power, when he is in any strait. And Queen Ingigerd said she would see to it that Olaf Haraldsson had fitting entertainment at Kœnugard and what place at court he would, and her sister's son Magnus should be brought up with the knjas's children, she said.

Thenadays Northern tongue was not spoken in Kœnugard but among the Swedish guard, that the knjas had always in his pay to fight the commons and keep them subject to him. Learned and great men spoke the Greek tongue;

which is there called the chief tongue of the World, and in Kœnugard none but poor and leprous folk used the vulgar tongue. Few spent any words on Olaf Haraldsson at Jarislav's court, and he was in little esteem; he fell into grief and sorrow over his wretchedness; none heeded him, only the woman who had been worst and most deceitful to him of old gave him alms from pity. And now, as many tales show, it befell the king that in his great need he turned his thoughts more and more to the chief who has more of a name than others for constancy to his friends, and patience in hearing them when they are come in a strait, and that is Christ king of Heaven, who shall judge men on the Last Day. Olaf had now frequent resort to the house of God, hearkening with effusion of tears to long-drawn chanting of monks, which in the Greek mass often holds great sadness and lamentation. But in that part of the World the Christian church is governed by men who are not much for the Holy See in Rome, and in Greek are named metropolitans, and over them are archimandrites and patriarchs, and they are all under the ban of the Lord Pope, as he under theirs. But Olaf Haraldsson could not tell their Christianity from what had been preached by his old friend bishop Grimkel of Canterbury, and indeed for most ends Greek and Latin were one to him.

Now Olaf would often sit in talk with the monks, whose speech he had learned to make out, and listen as they rehearsed excellent legends of the prodigies, revelations and notable visions of saints, the while snatching lice from their beards with great mastery. The Holy Allwisdom in its abundance now brought home to King Olaf in how mild an embrace Christ receives them that have squandered their kingdom, and with what patience he lifts them up again if they will obey and hearken to him. Olaf often spoke with the monks of his misery, landless and penniless as he was, eating the bread of strangers and an abomination to most; Jarislav would at no rate give him employ, nor yet grant him lands to sojourn or plunder in, as he was wont from a child. And the more Olaf's heart was touched by the

words of wisdom in the miracle-stories, and the colder it blew on him from Jarislav and his court, the more he seemed to discern the grace of the Emperor Christ.

It is said that Queen Ingigerd wished her first suitor Olaf Haraldsson to have a dwelling assigned him in Kœnugard where he might enjoy more esteem than he got from her consort Jarislav. And at her instance he was granted abode and fellowship with the townsmen who were dedicated to God in holy life. But it was God's law that no female creature should be suffered to pass the inner threshold of the monastery, but the queen of the land.

Ingigerd Olafsdaughter was a tall woman, fair and majestic like those women of swan-race of whom but few are seen in the North, and none in other lands. Day after day she had her queenly resort to the cloister to speak with her good-brother of the tidings reaching them from the North, for there her thoughts were continually. And when she spoke from the heart, it was her excuse to Olaf that her kin held the tribute of Uppsala by thirty descents in the male line, and put small faith in kinless men, rising in Norway by their own strength to take the title of king. For all that, she was far from thinking her baseborn sister Astrid worse matched than herself; to be sure it was kingly, she said, for a man to dispatch his brothers, as her husband Jarislav the Wise had done; but as queen she thought it less seemly that Jarislav should have four wives to boot of her, besides seven concubines. She said too that it was better to rise for a while by main strength in a sundered kingdom, and fall untimely in battle, than to rule Kœnugard in name, and yet not be called king for the Emperor of Byzantium, but knjas.

'And the black-browed hussies of Byzantium, naked to the navel, derided me for a shield-maid of the blood of trolls that had sucked a bear.'

At this time the monks were zealously gathering in all the skulls of saints and martyrs they could lay hands on, of the elect company felled in battle under King Vladimir, when he baptised the nation by force. Their intent was to

draw all Russia, as well as Bulgaria the Great and other kingdoms, on pilgrimage to their town to worship these holy men and women, blessed and in bliss, whose skulls by the mercy of God were bearing blossom and fruit in miracles. And all who found in their path a pleasing man's or woman's head would take it up and go to the cloister, and get a reward from the monks of cabbage soup with a scrap of meat in it.

Now when this king from the North was installed in the cloister, poor and bowed down, the monks asked what he could do to employ himself between holy offices, since Satan Hellcarl, the rival of Christ, in his great cunning specially tempts the idle. King Olaf said to be sure he had the name of a good man at many crafts, thus he could make boxes and carve in bone.

'Yet,' said he, 'I was most famed for my leech's hands, when we were aviking.'

And it was now seen that in his pouch, that he never parted from, were small knives and dainty pincers and awls, and he said that with these tools he had won a good name, when he was in arms to defend England and France and at last Norway, for he could put out the eyes or pull out the tongues of rebels or main prisoners and hostages. But when the monks had studied these tools, they hired Olaf to remove the flesh from the skulls of the martyrs and other holy men, put out their eyes and pull the tongues out of their mouths and loosen the palate, and then polish the crowns of their heads. These ancient, holy, wonderly fruitful heads were preserved in the church of the Holy All-wisdom in Kœnugård down to bishop Sigurgeir's time, and we ourselves have set eyes on them, that of our small means are compiling this little book.

★ 47 ★

It has been often discussed among learned men, how King Knud Svendsson gave his henchmen in Norway more power and good things than they had had before, so that they now felt themselves better able to visit those districts they were always disputing with the Swedes; and it was with them as with others living under a mighty king, they thought his empire would last for ever, and that all was open to them under cover of his supremacy. And thus Önund king of Swedes began to see danger at his gates. He felt the Norsemen were growing too stout, now they had an English king over them, mightier and with a greater army and more ships than the kings of Norway had ever had.

But since Önund Olafsson king of Swedes had Knud's sister to wife, he thought it reasonable to go cautiously to work with the Norse, neither straight forward nor by violence. He considered how he might check the Norse licence, and how much Knud would adventure to hold Norway, or get it back, if it should break from his hands; he saw he had blundered the year before, in giving Olaf the Stout too little support when the peasants were too strong for him, especially since most of the peasant chiefs had by now become Knud's men. He thought it better to have a small man for his neighbour in Norway than a high king of England.

Then as more and more of King Önund's captains brought him the same complaints of Norse inroads, the king finally lost patience and held a secret meeting with those chiefs he thought fit to consult. Nothing was revealed of their plans. But in the autumn King Önund sent envoys east to Russia

with silver, to have speech with Olaf Haraldsson the Stout, and offer to buy him a horse and what else he needed to leave Russia that winter, and a fleet should await him east of the Salt and sail him to his wife Astrid. That autumn a year had passed since King Olaf's coming to Koenugard.

The same day that the Swedish envoys opened their errand to Jarislav the grand knjas, Queen Ingigerd made her way to the cloister as she was wont, to speak with her good-brother King Olaf. He was busy at his work, using pincers to tweak the flesh from the palate of a saint's jaw; much incense burned in the room, for the health of souls and to combat the smell of ghosts. The queen sat down facing Olaf the Stout and watched him a while, rooting in the saint's jaws with great mastery. The queen was not gay. She broke silence thus:

'There are guests from Sweden within our gates, and they bring word that you are to return with them out of Russia and live with my sister Astrid again. But first you are to subdue Norway, and for that venture my brother Önund of Uppsala will furnish you with all the vagrants, beggars and thieves that are to be found in Sweden east and west of the Salt. This year the crops have failed in my brother's kingdom, and fighting men are easy to hire in most parts, in Eastland and in Osel, in Gotland and in Sweden itself; they are promised good booty in Norway.'

Olaf Haraldsson stayed his hand forthwith, and set down the saint's head with the pincers between its jaws. Then he said:

'I can see something is afoot here that will mean tidings, if it be true, though you deliver it without fervour.'

She replied: 'Tell me then how needful it seems to you to win back my sister Astrid.'

'If we are called to restore the kingdom of Norway,' said he, 'it must be the will of Christ and not men, though I had thought to serve the Monk-prince in other wise for a while. And be it remembered, Ingigerd, that I was a small man in your eyes at the time when I ruled the kingdom of Norway, and you affronted me by choosing instead that

manifold whoremonger, the axe-man of his family tree, though you were pledged to me by your own consent, and yet that man will never bear kingly title. Why should I be dearer to you now, when I reign over none but these mouldy heads?’

She said: ‘Now you mean to punish me because you cannot forget that I was proud, scarce more than a child, when you courted me and were but a seaman; my childishness deluded me into taking one who had more might and renown. Now I have learned that the more might a king has, the less share his wife has in his love. I had rather be friends with a man the monks keep to polish skulls, relics of tramps’ kin or sold by murderers to the bishops for cabbage soup, than a king’s wife reigning over a land of enemies. We have both, you and I, the same tongue, and the hue that in exile makes fellow-countrymen. My sister Astrid can play at chess and drink with our jarls to her heart’s content, and to boot was always an easy-going woman, with the figure of a dairy-woman standing over the churn or clapping butter on a shelf, and grinning like a serving-wench in a pothouse. If you go from here, I shall be left alone with the earth scorched under me to the roots.’

King Olaf said then: ‘A man must dare what Christ wills, and kingdoms are not to be had cheap, and with women let it be as it comes. Besides, a woman is more exalted by friendship with a king who cuts off the heads of living men than with one that polishes them dead; and Christ surely has days of great deeds in store for me, if there be truth in your tidings.’

Then said Queen Ingigerd: ‘It may well turn out that you will have the kingdom Christ means for you, but never Norway, and lie in the bed Christ has chosen you, but never with Astrid, your paltry swap for me. And from now on both our days will be after our deeds.’

And with these words the queen burst into tears, and got up and left the room with no other farewell, and shut the door after her. But Olaf Haraldsson the Stout wiped flesh

and blood from his pincers and awl and bodkin and little knives and praised the Lord Christ.

It is to be told that the Swedish king Önund gathered a fleet in the lands he had east of Eastersalt, ready for Olaf Haraldsson the Stout when he came down to the coast. And in winter Olaf set out from Russia with a fine company ; they harnessed horses to sleighs and drove on ice, and had a strong guard to guard the silver they carried with them. The Swedish king's jarls, who ruled the journey, had given their lord assurance that they would always call Olaf king in speaking to him.

When they came down to the coast, they found a warfleet ready to sail ; the Swedes made known that King Olaf was to have command of this fleet. Not all on board were good men ; outlaws had been levied, and crowds of thralls, whom great folk were not for keeping in bad years, besides all manner of tattered riff-raff, and such as are rounded up in woods like wolves ; and these were being entertained with stockfish and porridge, day about. There were no Christians on board, and few that spoke Northern tongue. King Olaf was received by the chiefs, the Swedish king's officers on the coast and isles, with proper banquets and worthy gifts. These were other days than when, not so long ago, he was on his way east in a trading-ship with his barefoot son by the hand, and none heeded them.

Christianity had scarce gained a footing east of the Salt at that time ; the Swedish captains would raise no dues either for Pope or Patriarch ; but old merchants had had themselves prime-signed when they were abroad, and some raised a chapel to the holy Basil of Cappadocia after they had settled at home ; good Swedish men were faithful to Thor, but the vulgar, who did not speak Northern tongue, put most faith in the god who was named Jumala and had a good staff in his hand, and here we pass over his other excellences.

King Olaf was grown such a near friend of Christ since he had been driven from land and empire that he could scarce without tears lack divine service and chanting in

Greek or Latin and the sound of bells ; yet he honoured above all understanding the subtle counsel of Christ, in giving his servant a heathen host to spread the true faith in Norway. But glad as he was of this levy, the chiefs were no less rejoiced that in this bad year the king of Swedes should have thieves and paupers and other scum of the coast and isles rounded up and carried away on ships for slaughter west of the Salt.

Olaf Haraldsson sailed into Mälar with the force he brought from the east ; and at the mouth of the river the king of Swedes came to meet him, affable and easy-mannered, and had much to impart : first the tidings that Knud was gone from the North for ever, and that boors were swaggering in Norway and thought they ruled all ; to make up for this they lacked heads, since Knud had won over their leaders with money, and so the peasants would get the worse if they had a strong army against them. Further, the king of Swedes had inquired where Olaf might look for support in Norway, and sent secretly to his kin and friends, and they were ready to stand by him if he came with a good army to defend the country against the peasants. And since the kings were agreed that Olaf's power was scarce big enough to liberate Norway, he got his good-brother's licence to raise as many men in all Sweden as would follow him ; King Önund promised to help him with this levy. There was then famine in Sweden ; the destitute were roaming the country in bands or taking to woods and out-skeries. The kings sent out men to collect these starvelings and lead them to the defence of Norway ; they were promised that in Norway they should have a right to all the good things they could lay hands on, and Norse farmsteads for their homes. And as may be thought, it seemed to many a man that here the rulers were offering them a most glorious journey. More quondam thieves, bark-eaters and outlaws were assembled than had ever been known ; the rank and file got porridge to eat, those of more quality stockfish and the captains flesh-meat. Weapons were not given them at the start, with which they might hew each

other down, for there was much jarring in an army composed of all sorts of riff-raff who could not understand one another. The chiefs thought it enough to show them chests of weapons they were to use on the Norse ; they were ill clad and tied birch-bark about their legs, till spring came with milder air. Neither did Olaf find Christian men among those who had been raised in Sweden to follow him ; and indeed a generation was to pass before Sweden became Christian, though the Uppsala kings were Christians in name so as to marry with kings of the South and foreign magnates and be called friends of the Pope ; in Uppsala stood a temple of Frey larger and more splendid than any church in the North. All learned men are agreed that the Uppsala kings did all they might to avert the Christian faith from Sweden. They wished their country to be at quiet, as Sweden had been of old, and gratified mischief-makers and foreigners just so far as became needful to buy themselves peace, and nothing beyond.

King Olaf now thought it strange that when he was come to Sweden on the motion of his wife's kin and in perfect friendship, he should be saddled with all its quondam foot-pads, together with starving crofters, tramps, foreigners and much other heathen folk, but denied spiritual aid ; and when he carried his distress to the king, the reply was that it had reached the bishops' ears that in Kœnugard King Olaf had been consorting with teachers of heresy, and outcasts obeying the Patriarch of Byzantium, which Christianity was in the lesser ban of the Lord Pope, as the Pope in the Patriarch's greater ban. No clerk from Bremen would be so hardy as to venture his soul by saying mass for King Olaf, but if the Lord Pope should give him plain warrant. And though he got a blander reception from his queen's kindred than heretofore, he got none from his queen, who did not ride to the ships to greet him. And on the approach of midwinter night, as the heathen Yule is called by the Swedes, the Uppsala king sent large carcasses of oxen down to the shore, where Olaf Haraldsson had his tent, and barrels of mead with them, but the king was as far as ever from his queen Astrid's knee ;

it was meant that he should drink Yule with his men on the shore and not in the king's hall in Uppsala ; the kingsmen evaded him when he brought this up. At last he would bear it no longer, but set out with a few men and rode to the castle, trusting to get to Astrid, his queen, before others could interpose.' And when he came to the castle, he learned that Astrid was sitting at the ale. She was told that a guest desired to speak with her, and what could be judged of him. She bade them show this guest into a room apart, and went to him there ; and when she saw it was Olaf, her husband, she greeted him courteously, yet with some surprise, and asked his news from the east, and why he had sought her out.

King Olaf replied: 'There was a time when I did not think you would ever have to ask your consort and lord his news. And what has happened since, that you sit at the ale-mug of a night when your husband has returned home to you, he that was once driven from you in sorrow?'

Queen Astrid said: 'You should have learnt long ago, Olaf, that we daughters of Uppsala regard substance more than hope. It is not to Ingigerd's and my taste to be wives of kings that are driven from land and empire. I have many a good man who can drink with me of an evening, and some are of birth and blood and lords of as much land in Sweden as all Norway, supposing you had it ; kings get us to wife for the lands they rule, and neither for love-longing nor for what birds sing of their future. And if my sister Ingigerd cast you off because you had only one foot in Norway, why should I cleave to you, a calf-kneed pot-bellied seaman, now you have none? I require you to conquer Norway before showing me your face again.'

We must not wholly neglect to trace out the paths of bishop Grimkel the Englishman, from the day he was left kingless in Norway with Knud as his enemy, and the bishops of Bremen would not own him.

As long as Olaf held Norway, the lords of the church got no say in who should be his court bishop; and indeed Olaf, like other Norse kings after him, was not much for complying with Bremen in any matter.

But when the Norse had driven Olaf out of the country, and Knud with English silver and ample promises had bought all the power in Norway, and all the magnates of Norway had turned very good friends to the English, each after his bargain and hope of gain, then came hard times for such friends of Olaf as for some reason might not play him false, and bishop Grimkel among them. Knud's bishops now possessed themselves of the field Grimkel had ploughed and sown, and the Bremen clerks took their share, and all Christians in the North became his traducers and foes, so soon as they were become sworn enemies to King Olaf Haraldsson; most good men were for laying this Grimkel under the ban, and some for apprehending and killing him. And when he had no safety of his life for these men of God, at first he kept himself hidden in Norway. But when he heard that the king of Swedes was at work to buy Olaf into the country, he made up his mind to go south in a trading-ship to France, where he joined company with pilgrims; that Yule they had crossed the Alps, and at Easter they came to Rome.

Bishop Grimkel was in the guise of a pauper, with staff in hand. And the tale is told that he had in his bag no

other treasure but a rotting fermented cheese, such as are made in the North and for smell surpass all created things in Christendom, so that thieves, robbers and cut-throats went far about a pilgrim carrying such an abomination.

In that age Rome shone with a more golden lustre in outlying parts of the World than ever before; the apostolic and catholic faith had spread not only eastward to the realm of the Poles but as far as Iceland and west to Greenland. The furthest nations praised Rome next Heaven, calling it the white Queen of the World, bright with maiden lilies, as it says in the pilgrims' song: *O Roma nobilis orbis et domina albis et virginum liliis candida.*

But just when the beauty of Rome shone brightest at the World's end, the times were sorest in Rome itself, as faithful chroniclers bear witness: it was not long since twelve popes in two decades had had to bite the dust before poisoners and assassins, their rivals for power, while others were first beheaded and then hung up by the feet; and we have yet to reckon those who were blinded or lost their noses or tongues or ended their lives in dungeons or snakepits, or were set backwards on asses in the streets of the city and maimed limb by limb as they rode; it had also chanced that when pilgrims came from the north, Dominus papa was hanging by his feet from a gibbet outside the walls, on the hill of Marius, where the pilgrims were wont to fall on their knees and recite their prayers in view of the Holy City, and the Holy Father's head was set on a stake beside the gibbet. For many generations Rome had been under the sway of robber bands, foreign and native by turns: there were counts of Campania, Tusculum and Sabina and the German empire, and they called themselves consuls and princes of Rome, and after them Guelfs and Ghibellines, Orsini and Colonna and other robbers. These bands had all but laid the city in ruin, making quarries of the old temples and gateways and monuments and castles and walls, and building breastworks against each other; lime-burners crushed old marble and mixed it with lime, the temple of Jupiter was a stable, all antique statues and sculptures in

Rome had long been thrown down ; most of the city was nothing but weedgrown ruins and pasture, and whenever there was a stay of tumult or a brief lull, the peasants' beasts had it for their common, goats, oxen and sheep ; and then peasants from Campania would also be stirring, and had leave to take away stones on their own and asses' backs, to build themselves cowsheds from ancient temples and palaces. And though there were more churches in Rome than in other places, yet chronicles relate that in no church but the apostolic basilica was there a chalice of silver, till Pope Innocent, the Third of that name, a hundred and seventy years later bestowed a mark on every parish church in the city to provide a worthy chalice. All learning had died out in Rome and the schools sunk into ruin, and there was not one man within the walls of the city that could play on the organ ; there they thought it the finest example for imitation that Peter himself had no art or learning but to catch fish, and yet had been set to keep Heaven's gate.

There was by then so much disease in Rome, that in some years but few and sometimes none of the pilgrims reached home again who sought the Holy City from distant lands. There was in the city more filth, putrescence, leprosy and fetor of corpses and beggary than any otherwhere in the World in those times. Yet learned men hold that the stench rising from the cheese bishop Grimkel had with him from the North did little to better the Roman air, but rather the contrary.

In those days there was no more evil pinch for the penniless than gaining speech of the Apostolic Father. All were denied letters from Pope or curia, but in payment for weighty money-bags. And it soon appeared that the canons sitting in council with the Lord Pope had more pressing concerns than to smooth the way of a gangrel bishop from the North ; the doorkeepers flatly refused to bring before the apostle Peter a bishop of such lowly estate that he had hired no fighting men to protect him from footpads and other criminals on the road, and was besides as foul-smelling as the heaps of departed plague-stricken in the city.

But it is told of Grimkel that his person and presence made folk stare ; he was a tall man, graceful in figure, and with a countenance such as painters commonly give to holy men and saints of God ; he had flowing black hair and a melancholy and noble pallor, and the radiance of his eyes was like the black jewel carbunculus, that skalds call the World's wonder, and he still turned his wide-open eyes to Heaven, as when he was young and stood at the blessed archbishop Ælfheah's side.

Now when Grimkel had more than once trudged in vain to the papal palace and met with insolence from the guards, one day he opened his bag, so that the stench rose from it, pulled out a very bright silver penny, and giving it to the doorkeeper, notified him that here was come Grimcetillus, court bishop to King Olaf Haraldsson of Norway, seeking audience of the Pope. Then he went away.

And then one day when Grimkel was in his chamber, weeping and singing in deep compunction of heart, as his custom was, there stood in the door a messenger from the papal court, to announce that on this day bishop Grimkel might come before the proxy of Christ and successor of Peter, Pope John the Nineteenth of that name, in the Apostolic Father's palace of Lateran, there to deliver his errand.

Pope John the Nineteenth, Romanus by his name in the world, was a Roman layman of the Tusculan counts' family, and was besides Pope the secular captain, consul and prince of Rome ; he had never been ordained a priest, nor been to school to learn his letters or singing of Latin, and commanded only the peasant dialect that is called *lingua volgare* or *vernaculum*. John had one day bought himself the Holy See with gifts, and with the aid of that king of Germany who was known as Conrad. He was to maintain John in office against other robbers, and John to anoint Conrad emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.

And when bishop Grimkel of Canterbury had been led across many floors in the Pope's palace into the Apostolic Father's saluatorium, and came to try his luck on old,

smooth-worn flags under a Roman arch smothered in dust and exceeding great spider's-webs, there sat Pope John in a red gown brodered with gold, along with the reverend canons he was wont to have about him; but motionless in a corner was sitting the German monk who alone in the Pope's household could use a pen, and who had it in charge from the Emperor Conrad to find counsel for Pope John and guide his steps, but especially to watch over cameram, which is the treasury; he had the title of camerarius.

These magnates of the Lord sat on high-legged chairs in the ancient Roman style, with tall backs and narrow seats. Along the walls were stone vessels and wooden chests, besides cups and drinking-bowls from Byzantium; there was also a lectulus or couch by the wall, covered with a Saracen cloth of gold web and with a canopy over it. A copper crucifix stood behind the high seat, an offering from Ireland, since profligate men had smashed all images and memorials in the city. On this cross were depicted legends in high relief, and in the middle could be seen dominum in his imperial robes, with blessing hands and an angel on each shoulder, and sicut his head touched paradisum, at his feet lingered a devout pair, the apostle John and sancta virgo, the two that in true love sorrowed most at the Lord's departure from Earth.

And at the same time as Grimkel's saintly countenance was revealed to them in curia, a ghastly smell reached their noses. And Grimkel dropped on his knees before the Pope with great reverence, kissing his foot. And when Dominus papa had had the guest bidden to open his mouth, bishop Grimkel addressed the Most Holy Father and curiam in these words:

'I Grimcetillus, most abject of clerks in God's Christendom, would first sue the Apostolic Father to call to mind the day when evildoers stoned learned men on the banks of the river Thames. When bones and rubbish were thudding on the frail body of that precious old man Alphegus, I, that waited on him as a lad, begged my master's leave to step forward and receive the blows designed for him. And that

is the beginning of my story. Next let it be told that I have dragged out fifteen years in serving the Lord at the World's end, where its name is Norvegia, as court bishop to King Olaf Haraldsson, who then ruled that country ; and in those haunts there had never appeared a man skilled in holy song, before we came there, striving to preach Christianity to the scum that has its abode with wolves and dragons. But though my king be now exiled, I beseech my high lord the Pope to save those poor servants of the Lord that once put most faith in him from being driven into the forests to dig roots and gnaw bark, and to stay other men of God from seeking the lives of their brethren, that have continued for many years in fight with wild beasts and dragons pro Christo. I pray the Apostolic Father to have in mind that King Olaf and I had more men baptised in Norway in two summers than the bishops of Norway under the see of Bremen in a hundred and fifty years. We built three hundred churches there, and King Olaf gave Christ lands in Norway along with great riches and all his heart, soul and body. But next safety of my life, it is my petition and supplicatio to have letters from the Pope giving me the same office and charge as the Bremen bishops in Norway, where I have preached the gospel.'

The Apostolic Father yawned mightily during this speech, scratching himself, spitting and snorting, and then said in his dialect:

'How this fellow stinks. What is he yapping about?'

The Pope and his canons now talked together a while, and Dominus papa used somewhat testy words. And at last the canon who had most credit with him said Christ was not like to think himself much made up with granting of forest and hunting rights to Norse churches ; great offerings could not be looked for from the bogeys and dragons this man had been fifteen years fighting.

'And it seems bizarre to the Pope,' said this canon, 'that he should be told there is any king of Norway but our friend Knud, the king of the English, who inherited Norway from his father. And to our knowledge no other king has

been designated to that throne. The Apostolic Father says he will never betray his friend Knud, who owns Norway, or let nameless kings edge themselves into his kingdom; never will Pope John forget that when he made his friend Conrad the German emperor, Knud was the only notable king ready to do him honour and journey to Rome in his support; and on that journey Knud received many favours from the Pope for his bishops, and promised in return ample dues from his lands, which he has indeed punctually discharged. And we do not mean to use Knud so scurvily that there will be no more Peter's Pence from England.'

Grimkel then said that King Olaf Haraldsson was expected out of the east this summer with a redoubtable army to conquer Norway; and there would be little defence in the land, since Knud had returned home to govern England.

'But,' said Grimkel, 'where will the bishops of Bremen and Knud's men find refuge, when King Olaf returns to avenge his griefs? Would it not be convenient then to have one at hand that had letters from the Pope and was likewise Olaf's near friend, able to soften the king's temper when he is going about to string up his enemies?'

The high clerks talked for a while, asking each other who this man Olaf might be, who thought he could bid defiance to King Knud Svendsson, and whose court bishop this pilgrim declared himself. None in curia had ever heard tell of King Olaf Haraldsson, and they scarce knew how to deal with the matter, till the German monk raised his voice, he who was better informed than most other clerks in the household of the Lord Pope. He said:

'This Olaf was one of a band of pirates from Scandinavia, that foreign kings hired to fight for them. He was among those who were fed by the duke of Normandy to burn the great church at Chartres, which they call Hjartrosaborg. Then he burned a long while in Norway, but he is now fled to the dominions of the emperor of Byzantium and our enemy the Patriarch, to consort with heretics. For his proceedings he is anathema by the law of God.

'But,' said the German monk, still addressing himself to

the Pope in *lingua volgare*, 'Grimcetillus, yon rascal who is not far from blaspheming Christ in his talk, received mitre and crozier from Armenian schismatics behind horse-rumps in Rouen.'

And when the Apostolic Father heard that, he struck the arms of his chair and said vipers in priest's clothing, that had taken consecration from schismatics, should be boiled alive like false coiners.

'And I wonder,' said the Pope, 'if yon zany has in his bag flesh of the poisonous efts and dragons he has been jointing in Norway for fifteen winters.'

The canon construed the Apostolic Father's words to bishop Grimkel as follows:

'The Apostolic Father has heard the Gregorian schismatics from Armenia hallowed you somewhat too near horses in France, O Grimcettile; and the clerk who receives consecration from strolling bishops is excommunicate. What speech or shift have you for this strait, my son?'

A wise English clerk has written that neither a just cause nor words and reasons are of any avail whether speaking with the proxy of Christ or with Christ himself, for Christ is not only the wisdom of the Universe but the beginning and end of all words and reasons, and what he requires of men is not their philosophy and learning in dialectic; the worth of our gift, reckoned in coined silver or other blessing binding us to the creature world, that and that alone counts in speaking with Christ. And it may be that bishop Grimkel had met with this true opinion somewhere. For when the canons had reprehended him for a while and prescribed him sackcloth and ashes, this pilgrim spoke up as follows:

'If dust and ashes may yet make bold to address the Lord, as the patriarch Abraham was suffered to do, first let it be said that it is not come to men's knowledge where the venerable apostle Peter went to school, nor where that precious fisherman received consecration and tonsure at whose feet I shall presently abase myself. And it has been no secret among mankind that the Holy Ghost was out

walking, when the mainstay of Christianity was elected and lifted up on the apostolic throne.'

And now bishop Grimkel threw himself flat at the feet of the Lord Pope on the stone floor, sighing and weeping with his face in his hands, till he rose up on his knees with these words:

'Here the holy teaching and sermon is confirmed, that the praise of the Lord rises highest and his omnipotence most appears in those articles of mercy which are least honoured by human reason; and of all the popes since Gregorius Magnus died, the most glorious in word and deed is he who now speaks without consecration, tonsure or school. And therefore I make it my suit to the Apostolic Father and reverend worthies in curia to consider that this miserable acolutus, who received ring and staff with horses about him and no relics but Cabbage-Christ and Onion at hand, has yet converted King Olaf Haraldsson to the true religion and thereafter all Norway.'

And here bishop Grimkel lifted his cheese from the bag, set it down at the Pope's feet and then stuck his knife in it, and out of the cheese poured a profusion of gold and silver like swarming maggots; and this hoard was both good and bright.

'And here I offer you,' went on Grimkel, 'the belated first-fruits of my Norse bishopric, mine and King Olaf Haraldsson's gold and silver.'

And in the face of such prodigies the Apostolic Father was stricken dumb, and his canons likewise, and the Pope and his canons came from the high-seat and went down on the floor to look at the gold. But the Emperor Conrad's monk, who could use a pen and managed the treasury, said that truly they could by no means even a strolling clerk or vagum with the spiritual lords of Norway, the bishops of Bremen, or with bishops sent by the king of England, Knud Svendsson, who was in the eyes of God and all Christendom the rightful owner of Norway; but Grimkel should be given a letter enjoining the see of Bremen and other lawful proxies of the apostles not to be lifted up against him, and

not to visit him either with excommunication or sentence of death, but on the contrary to acknowledge and bear with their poor brother whose will was good, till it were fully shown whom Christ intended to be master of Norway.

'But on the day,' said this monk, 'when King Olaf Haraldsson becomes lord and king of that country by the will of God, or is exalted by notable penance and compunction, but especially by a death that can be reckoned martyrdom, so that the angels of Heaven may rejoice, and it may be understood by learned and lay that the Lord has chosen him to bear witness of his god with singularly clear prodigies, on that day and in that same hour shall brother Grimcetillus be raised to his proper rank.'

★ 49 ★

In Norway the last of all trees to ripen is the bird-cherry. Birch, lime and other trees bear their seed while the spring nights are still dark, but the fruit of the bird-cherry does not turn black till summer is waning.

Olaf Haraldsson found it slow work to prepare his march from Sweden, putting heart in the men and spirit in the commanders, stifling disputes and supplying defects. He sent word to his friends and kinsfolk in Norway that they were to raise an army in secret and join him when he came over the fells from Jämtland that summer. And this was to be their watchword, that none must fail when the bird-cherries were ripe.

But though these messengers from King Olaf were to seek out his men in Norway by stealth, it appeared as often before that many a friend is lodged among unfriends. Word of the king's motions came to his enemies no less than his friends. But so soon as these tidings got abroad, the

peasants began to take alarm. They had no doubt that if Olaf got a footing in the country again, he would soon be harrying them afresh with fire, murder, torture, pillage and other violence. They looked on Olaf Haraldsson as a felon, whose life was forfeit under the law that had been current at most Things from the dawn of ages. And once more they vowed to put him to death, when they could come at him.

Of Thormod Coalbrowsskald it is to be said that he had returned to Norway and was going from place to place, seeking out all the chiefs who had any fame, and asking where champions might be found who had borne stout hearts in battle. On some he would make a verse, on others a song, and a lay on those who deserved such glory. But new times were on their way in the North, and chiefs were relying less on manhood and deeds of war than on the favour of kings and bishops. And halting tramps were not summoned to praise high kings. The skald often found himself musing whether his oath-brother Thorgeir Havarsson had not been the last champion in the North, King Olaf Haraldsson set aside, who had been turned out of his kingdom by crofters.

Now it reached the wanderer's ear that King Olaf Haraldsson might be expected from Sweden that summer, to give Norway strength to raise itself out of obloquy; and at this prospect life returned to his bones, that had taken cold in Greenland. Now it seemed that the North would be loosed from the bonds in which it had lain, if the oath-brothers' king were coming again with a redoubtable army to claim his heritage. And the skald saw the King, Blest of the Gods, marching out of the east with the sun of his glory. He sped, lame as he was, through wood and meadow, from shire to shire north into the Trondelag, for it was there, he heard, that the king would be coming over the fells in bird-cherry time. And when he entered the long and deep dales of Norway, where the roads keep company with rivers and lakes and draw close to mountains that are boundaries in that countryside, then it came about that roads and paths

struck him as more thronged than ordinary. He saw mostly poor folk laden with their belongings, hired labourers and cottars. Some were leading pack-horses; they went commonly two by two, and never more than five in a group; there was always space between them, and they did not know each other when they encountered, or change many words. Yet more were leading their horses wide of the highroad, or carrying loads by forest and fell. All these men seemed to be abroad each on his own errand and not a chief's, and when Thormod addressed them, they replied curtly. One said that he was removing with all his goods, another meant to buy butter and meal for labour. There were besides many lime-burners and salmon-fishers and herring-fishers and others on their way from the fishing-grounds.

One day when they had come down from the fell, a lime-burner turned to the skald and said:

'What sort of gangrel are you? This last while we run into you time and again, and where are you going?'

He said: 'I am an Icelandic skald, and am seeking your king.'

The other gangrel replied: 'It is strange if Icelanders are now running after firewolves to rule them, when they fled this country for Harald Comelyhair's sake.'

Thormod replied: 'But it is stranger that Norsemen will not have the rulers that win them fame by stout heart.'

The lime-burner said: 'There have been sundry kings in Norway, but they were only good for anything when we offered them up for crops and peace.'

Thormod said: 'From my father and other good men in Iceland I learned most skald's work in Northern tongue, and never did I hear tell of any winning this country renown but the kings who here proceeded against their unfriends with fire and flame, and these kings' champions. These men are also the most renowned in Icelandic song, though but very few were born to long life, and not salmon-takers and lime-burners.'

One of the crofters said: 'The mill my grandfather built

on his green, Jarl Hakon Sigurdsson knocked down. My father built a new mill, and King Olaf Tryggvason knocked it down. I myself built a small mill, when I was young. King Olaf Haraldsson burnt it, when he was harrying us in Romsdale.'

A man from beyond the forest said: 'I had three cows over yonder, the kingsmen salted all three and called it a tax.'

There was in the band a noble-looking old man with glorious hair and eyes, and he said: 'With great pains I had dug and built a deep and clear well, when King Olaf Haraldsson came by under the sign of the cross with his fifteen war-captains; three who were highest in rank he called his Wise Men of the East, the other twelve he called his Apostles after the yeomen that followed Christ. They all, the war-captains and the king himself, pissed in my well.'

A herring-fisher said: 'Bad times have come on us Norsemen since we left off sacrificing the rulers and began eating whalemeat.'

Thormod felt one of the men's cudgels, laughed and said: 'What can you small folk do, poor fellows thinking to use a knobbed stick on the kingsmen's tempest of steel?'

The peasant said: 'In war the losers are those who put faith in steel.'

From such chat Thormod perceived that he had better approach his king in other company. He came to the Trondelag, but turn where he would it was to meet folk whose way was not his. Bands of them rose out of every fissure and furrow and hid themselves behind trees and boulders, or sidled down scarce visible forest paths, cattle trails and sheep tracks, and all seemed to have the same goal. Most had tousled beards and had tucked their hair into the neck of their jerkins. Some among them were lads with down on the chin, with feet well-nigh bare, sun-burnt and loud-voiced; sticking out of the horses' packs were clubs, forks and spades, now and then a spear could be seen. When night fell, they lay down on the spot to sleep; some drew a hair-sack over them, others laid them-

selves on the bare ground. These were all Christian men, and next morning clerks rode among the sleepers holding the cross aloft and rang bells, for now they were to be up and hear holy song. The clerks exhorted the men, bidding them never, as long as Christ lived, forget the murders, firings and robberies of yon malefactor, who was now coming down on Norway with foreigners to renew his havoc. Never yet, they said, had so large a native army been brought together in this poor country, and now the strength of the many would be victorious. They bade the sons of Norway stand fast, and hurl back such a band of robbers. Snorri Sturluson reports these words, that the bishop addressed in Christ's name to the peasants of Norway:

'Now it is time,' said the bishop, 'to hew down that rabble for eagle and wolf, and let each lie where he was hewn down, or if you will, drag the bodies under mound and cairn.'

★ 50 ★

North in the Trondelag lies Veradale, under the border forests between the realm of Norway and Jämtland in Sweden. There highroads meet, and thither all waters flow; mountains and hills slope down to broad valleys with woods, fields and rivers. Lambs graze among bushes, and cows lie chewing the cud under ancient barrows. Midway in the dale is a farmhouse, and behind it rise aspen and sycamore, birch and lime; the bird-cherry too is there, and the dandelion is the same that flowers in Iceland. This place is named Stiklastadir. It is the opinion of learned men that valleys where the country slopes down to a place of rest, like the benches in a Greek amphitheatre, are often the scene of events that decide the fate of kings. And here

indeed fell King Olaf Haraldsson, the day after the end of this book. And we, who were gathering matter for this relation, came to Veradale one day a thousand years after, and saw in the east the blue mountains from which the king began his last march to Norway, without clerks, forsaken of skalds, left by friends and lovers, but leaning upon a foreign, heathen army, and then the stones were silent in Stiklastadir, and nothing remained of King Olaf's saga but a sigh in the leaves.

On the eve of King Olaf's fall, when the peasant army was gathered at Stiklastadir under the holy cross, and the king's on its way down from the high fells, an Icelandic skald was also in Veradale, seeking the king he had chosen. No book reveals what spirit of prophecy made known to the skald that the king on his way to be crushed by Norse peasants was yet to be the only king in the North that would surpass Knud the Rich in glory and praise, and his praise has flourished no less in Heaven than on Earth; to him not only terrestrial dukes and emperors and bishops and popes have bowed down, but also saints, martyrs and virgins, and all the Mighty of Heaven, archangels, thrones, cherubim and seraphim. Yet none have been so smitten with Olaf as Icelandic skalds, and here is a sign of it, that never in the World has there been written a book on kings, nor on Christ himself, that can even halfway compare with the one we owe to the learned Snorri, which is called the saga of Olaf the Holy.

The skald Thormod Bessason limped about Veradale, thinking where in the camp of the king's enemies he should knock for the supper he had need of to begin the new age that was at hand. Tents had been pitched and fires lit on the bank of the river, and there the leeches had gathered to brew their herbs. Then a man stood in Thormod's path; he was greybearded, clad in a worn smock and a broad-brimmed hat pulled down low on his forehead, and much like the other peasants in this assembly; but when he spoke, the voice sounded familiar in Thormod's ear.

'There is a woman near by,' said the man in the smock.

‘She has had news of your motions, Thormod, and wishes speak with you.’

Thormod asked where this woman might be. The man in the smock bade Thormod come with him. A woman in skins squatted by the river boiling herbs over a fire, a troll to look at and with eyes larger than most other women’s. This woman stood up and bade Thormod heartily welcome; but when she went to kiss him, he took a step back and said surely he did not know her.

‘Who are you?’ he said. ‘And what brings you here?’

She said: ‘I am Coalbrow, your Beloved, that has your life-egg; I am come from Greenland to be the death of my rival and you oath-brothers’ king, Olaf Haraldsson, but to brew livegiving herbs for those who dispatch him.’

He said: ‘You will get no thanks for that.’

‘We have yet to see who will get least thanks, before all is done,’ said the woman, ‘but I will spare your king, provided you wrest the song you made for him to my praise.’

‘What fee have you to offer the skald for that lay?’ said he.

She replied: ‘I have a wattled house in the heather and two young goats,’ and handed the guest a cup full of goat’s milk.

He said: ‘I had once a manor in Isafjord Deep, brighter and more bounteous than any other place in the world of men; flounder move through the sea, flocks on the fell, mouse-grey cows with swollen udders, of merman breed, jog to the milking-place at sundown. There I loved a swan, that has not her like among queens. There I bade two little girls farewell. In the hands of a foreign thrall I left all behind me, for the fame which comes before every treasure, and the praise the skald is chosen to offer a mighty king and his champions, that it may live among gods and men while the ages roll. And now, when I have thrown all overboard, in loyalty to the heart that alone of all hearts in the World knew no trembling, and the king who was lord of that heart, and at last have drawn near my king, now you offer me a hut in the heather and two kids.’

'Never,' said the woman, 'will the king you seek come into the power that I have.'

He made no answer to that, but thanked her for food and drink, limped away and made for the fells in search of his oath-brother's king, that he knew with the skald's vision would be the most famous and splendid of all kings of the North, praised above others while ages roll.

Dusk was falling. And when it was dark, the mistress summoned her thrall. Shaghair was a little way off among the peasants; some were making bludgeons from roots and some whittling arrows. She said:

'We have been too late to stay that wanderer, who is busy about folly and playing us false and is Olaf the Stout's skald. What would you have us do with him?'

'I am not wont to be asked advice on how you shall use your beggars,' said Shaghair thrall.

She said that was true.

'I have long been a niggard mistress to you, yet still less of a woman,' said she. 'That man yonder is to blame.'

'I am your thrall, mistress,' said he.

'If so, it is time to make an end of it,' said she, taking something from her belt and holding it out. 'Here is my knife. Go now and do not show yourself in my tent till you can show me Thormod Coalbrowsskald's blood on the edge. In that hour it will be seen whether you are man or thrall.'

Thormod Coalbrowsskald now left the encampment of the rebels to seek the king on the fell. The peasants had spied on Olaf Haraldsson's army and knew he was not far off. That day the horses' packs had been opened, with the chests of weapons for the king's men. King Olaf had not trusted his men to keep the peace with each other if they got weapons in hand much before the armies joined battle. Shoes also were given out to those that had torn their feet on the mountains, and those who had marched on Norway without a shirt were given smocks. Now they had reached Norway, they were pinning their faith to the king's promise of ample booty in food, clothes and valuables.

Thormod had not walked far when he met the king's outposts; they spoke the dialect that was current east of the Salt, but when another came up that could speak Northern tongue, they asked Thormod his name and errand. He told them he was an Icelandic skald, seeking audience of King Olaf Haraldsson with a lay he had made. One of the men said:

'We are charged to treat all who speak the tongue of this land straight on and without groping for words as traitors to king and country.'

The guard that spoke Northern tongue replied:

'There was nothing about how to treat an Icelandic skald asking to reel off gibberish to the king. What do you think, comrades?'

The third guard said: 'Why not try the spears they gave us tonight on this ragamuffin?'

More well-armed kingsmen came running to gape at the

skald. Some felt round him to see if he were hiding a knife or other edge tool, and soon assured themselves that he had only his staff. Several captains came up and asked his tidings of the Norsemen's array, their numbers and weapons. Thormod readily answered that he had never seen a less warlike army, worse furnished with most things that carry a hope of victory in warfare. None in that army had weapons such as are praised by skalds, whereas there were myriads of thick boughs and bludgeons of roots, as well as churnstaves and beams.

'And it is very hardy,' said he, 'of soft wood grown from the mould to bid battle to kingly steel.'

The end of it was that some of the guards were sent with Thormod to show him the way to the king's tent. On a heather hill stood an old cairn. The king's tent stood at the foot of a cliff with the cairn rising against the sky behind. Strong guards were posted around the king's lodging. The kingsmen had put their horses to graze in gullies and hollows, while their baggage and harness was piled up under the cliff. Most in this army had no other distinction than the weapons that had just been dealt out to them, and were much like those homeless folk who in bad years have to wander from door to door. Here were no golden knights curbing their great stallions and swinging famous old swords, nor champions biting the shield-rim and bellowing and giving other proofs of rare manhood to startle folk, nor yet high-born vassals sunning themselves in the grace and favour of a great king.

Now the men crowded round Thormod to know his errand, and most jeered at a poor wretch who came straight from the enemy camp the night before battle and did not stick to demand the king himself. The king had other things on his mind tonight, they said, than listening to Ice-landic tramps' flummery. So there would be more sense in telling them whether the pigs in Norway were fat, and the cattle in good case. They had had enough of the Swedes' barleygruel. Some had heard that there were willing women in Norway, and therefore counted on softer